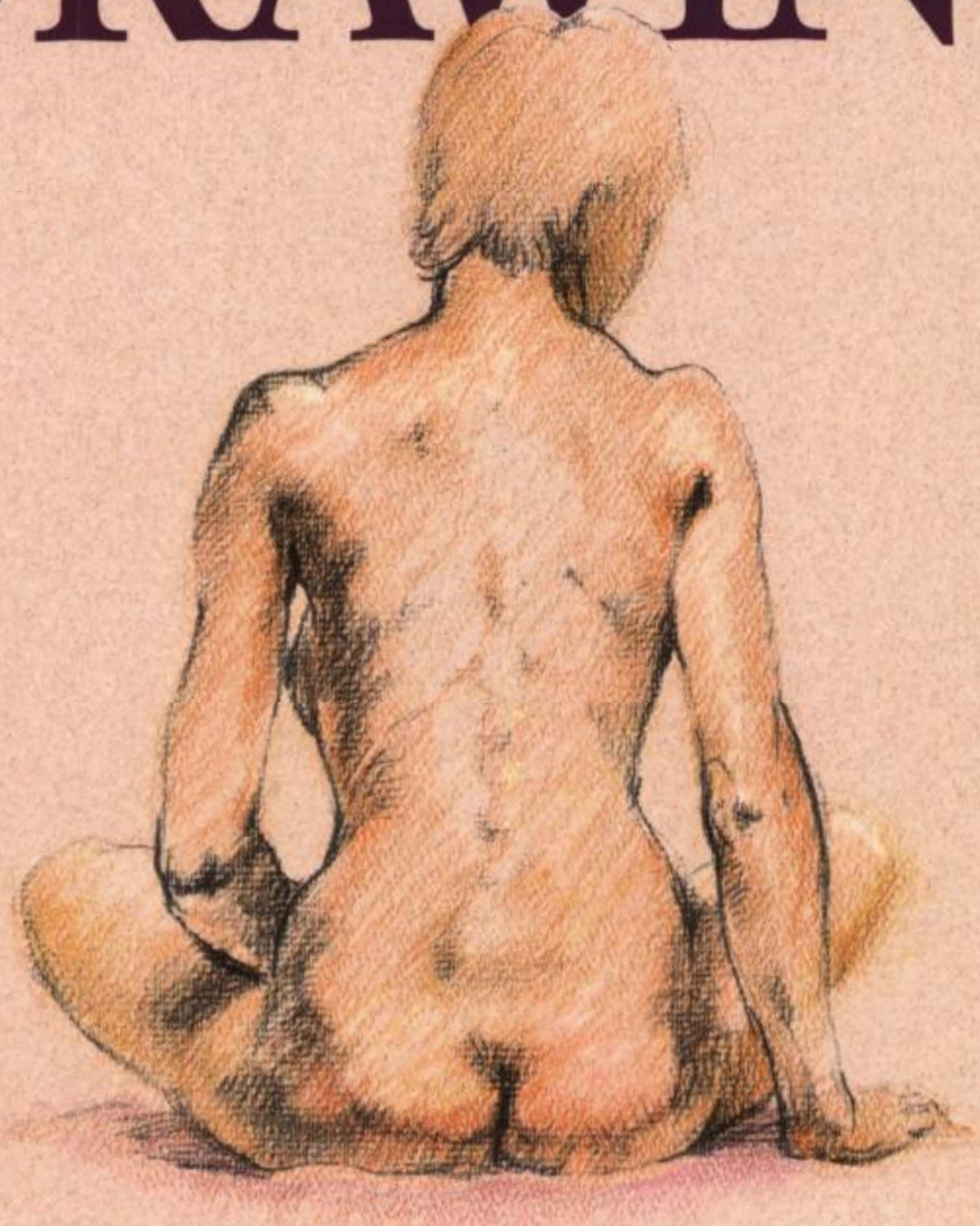
REALISTIC FIGURE DRAWING



Joseph Sheppard

REALISTIC FIGURE DRAWING



Joseph Sheppard

NORTH LIGHT BOOKS

Cincinnati, Ohio

About the Author

Joseph Sheppard attended the Maryland Institute of Art, where he studied with Jacques Maroger, the former technical director of the Louvre and reformulater of the painting medium used by the Old Masters. He has received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Traveling Fellowship. His work is in many prestigious collections throughout the United States and he has received several major commissions for murals in Baltimore and Chicago. He is the author of six art instruction books and until 1976, he taught drawing, painting, and anatomy at the Maryland Institute of Art. He is a member of the Allied Artist's of America, the Knickerbocker Artists, New York; and the National Sculpture Society. Mr. Sheppard resides in Pietrasanta, Italy, where he maintains a studio.

Realistic Figure Drawing.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

I PROPORTIONS 3

II RENDERING FORM IN LIGHT & SHADE 12

III FORMS OF THE FIGURE 16

IV THE STANDING FIGURE 28

V THE SEATED FIGURE 44

VI THE KNEELING FIGURE 60

VII THE CROUCHING FIGURE 74

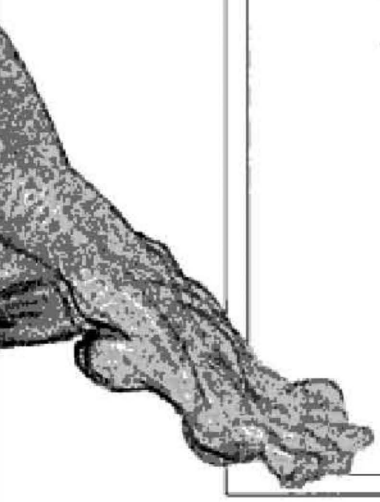
VIII THE RECLINING FIGURE 88

IX THE FORESHORTENED FIGURE 98

X THE FIGURE IN ACTION 116

CONCLUSION 133

INDEX 134





INTRODUCTION

Although I paint and sculpt just about every subject, my real joy is in, and my best work is of, the human figure. So it was very natural, when I started to teach, that I should teach a course in life drawing.

Many of the drawings in this book I did in the life class, working along with the students. They are drawings of either two-minute or twenty-minute poses. I selected them from about ten years' work.

When you draw the human figure you draw something alive, not a still life. I recommend drawing from the *live* model. First use quick poses of one to three minutes, and then longer poses up to twenty minutes. If you try to draw the entire figure (including hands and feet) in the sketches, you will eventually find that twenty-minute poses will give you ample time. Very few of the drawings in this book took more than twenty minutes. Over-rendering can freeze the figure and make it look like a statue—dead.

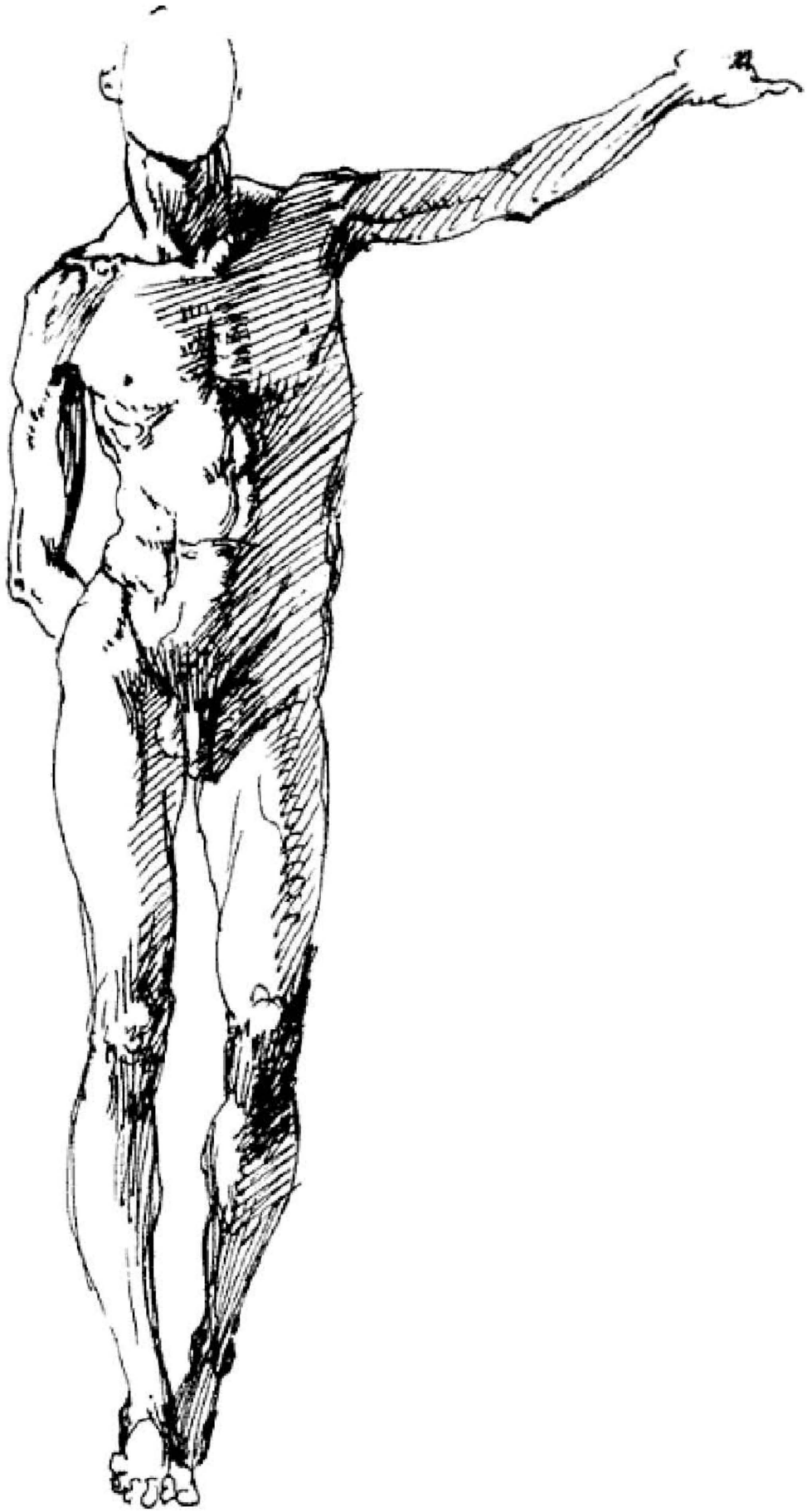
It is extremely important to place a single source of light on the model. The Old Masters discovered that one light source, preferably high and slightly to the front and side, gives the best light for creating depth and form.

An understanding of anatomy and proportion is a *must*. You will soon discover that you draw and see only what you already *know*. In my teaching I find that when a student first starts drawing from the model, he sees only outline. After the shadows are pointed out to him, he tries to render form. Once a muscle, tendon or bone is explained, he will always recognize it and include it in his drawing. The more he learns about the figure, the more he sees.

The drawings in this book are arranged first by position—standing, sitting, kneeling, and then by viewpoints—front, back and side. I discuss each drawing in much the same way that I would if I were teaching my class. Each drawing dictates what should be said about it. In one section, for example, I might talk about the wrist because it's prominent in a particular drawing, and then not mention the wrist again until another chapter, where it again becomes important.

In the course of discussing the many positions and viewpoints shown in this book, most of the important aspects of drawing the figure are covered: anatomical points, proportion, attitudes and weight distribution, rendering, variations and types, foreshortening, the figure in motion, and whatever else might arise.

I've deliberately used different mediums to let you see as much variety as possible. There are unlimited techniques and mediums with which you can draw. Feel free to use whatever tools and techniques you desire. It's not what you draw with, but how you draw, that is most important.



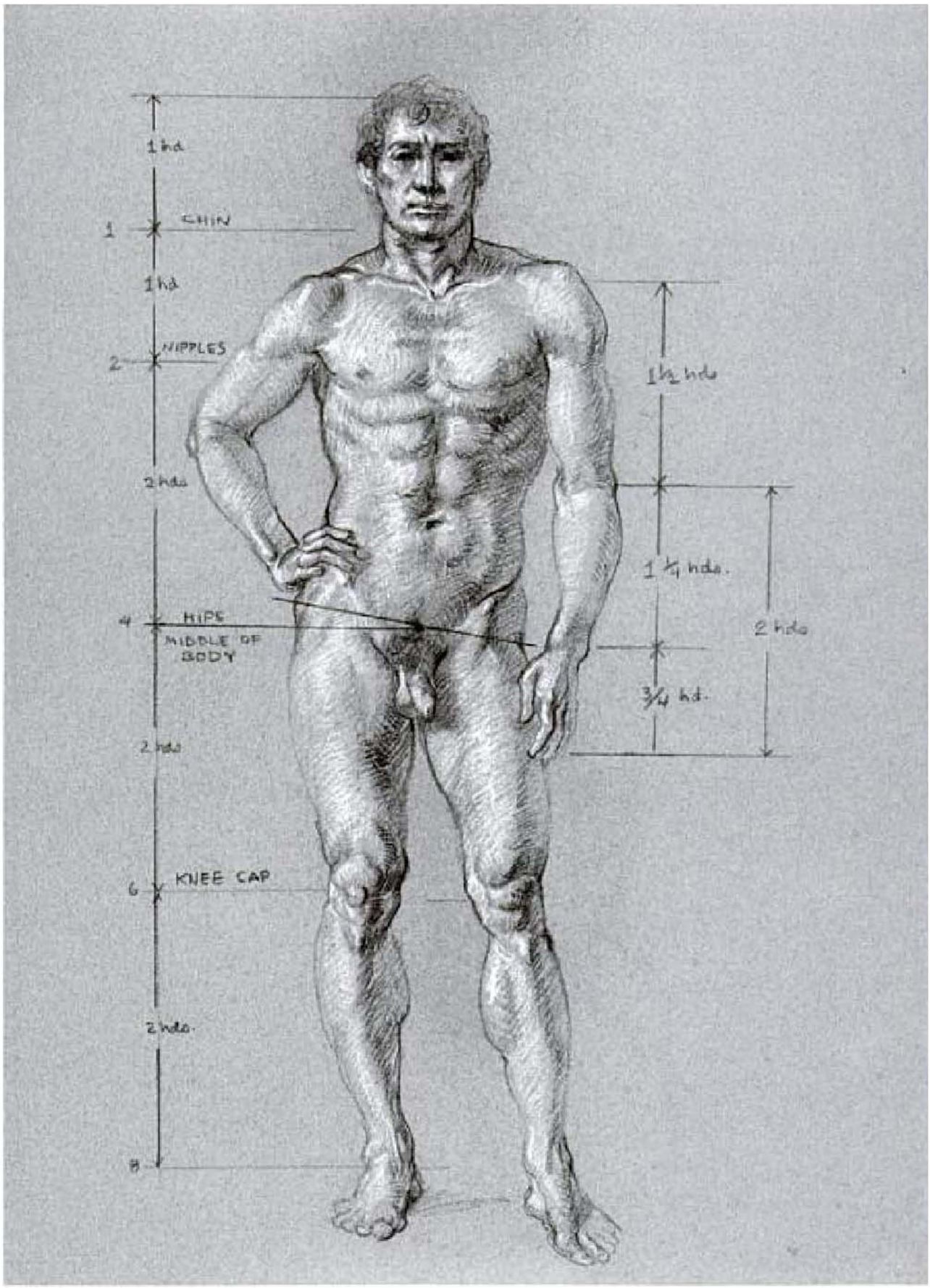
PROPORTIONS

I

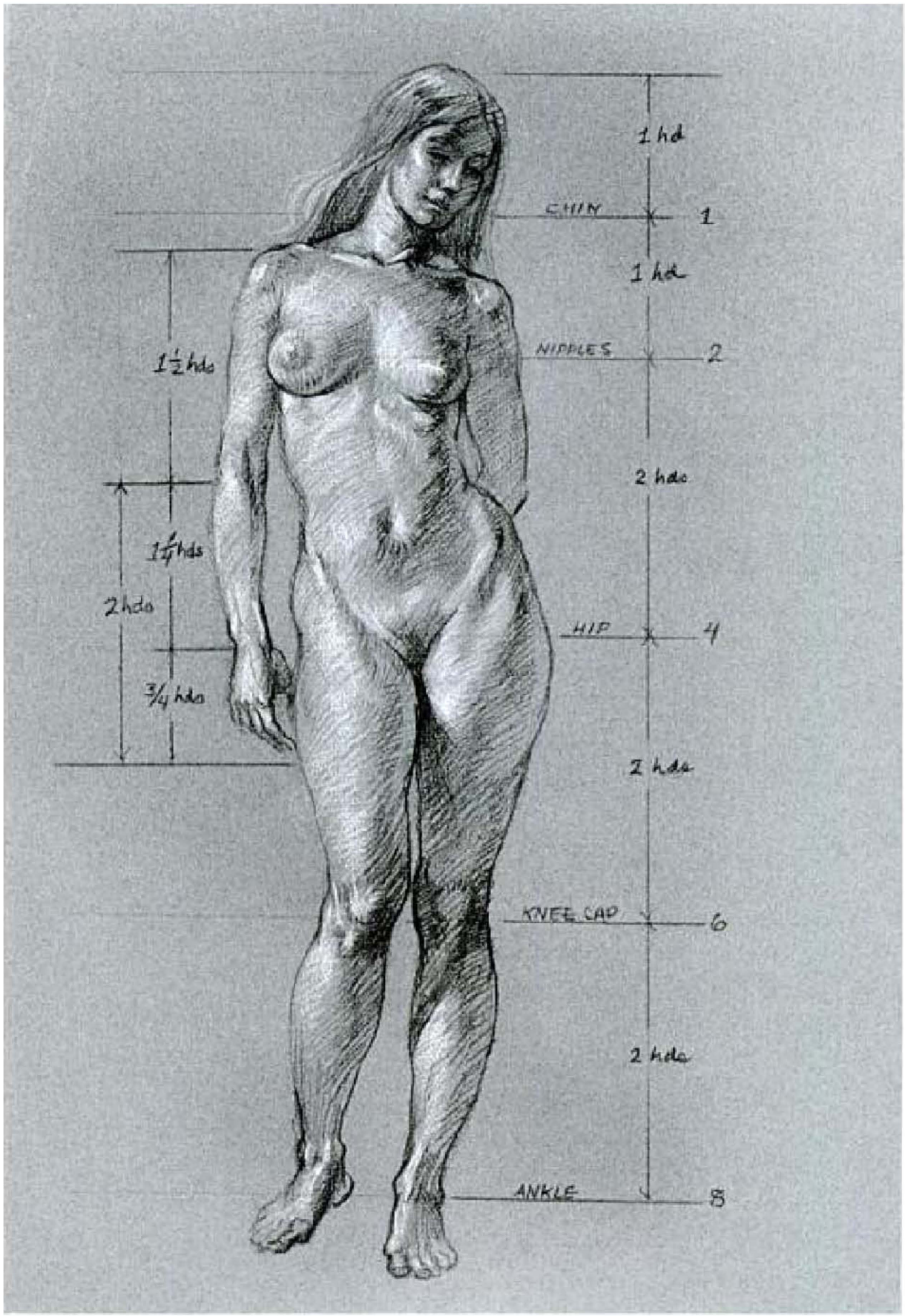
Proportions vary from person to person. However, classic Greek and Renaissance figures were eight heads in height, the head being used as the unit of measure. The Mannerist artists created elongated figures of nine or more head lengths. In nature, the average height of the human form is seven and a half heads. The figure that measures eight heads long seems by far the best: It gives dignity to the figure and also seems to be the most convenient for measuring.

The classical male figure measured two heads across the shoulders and one and a half across the hips. The female width measurements are just the opposite of the male's.

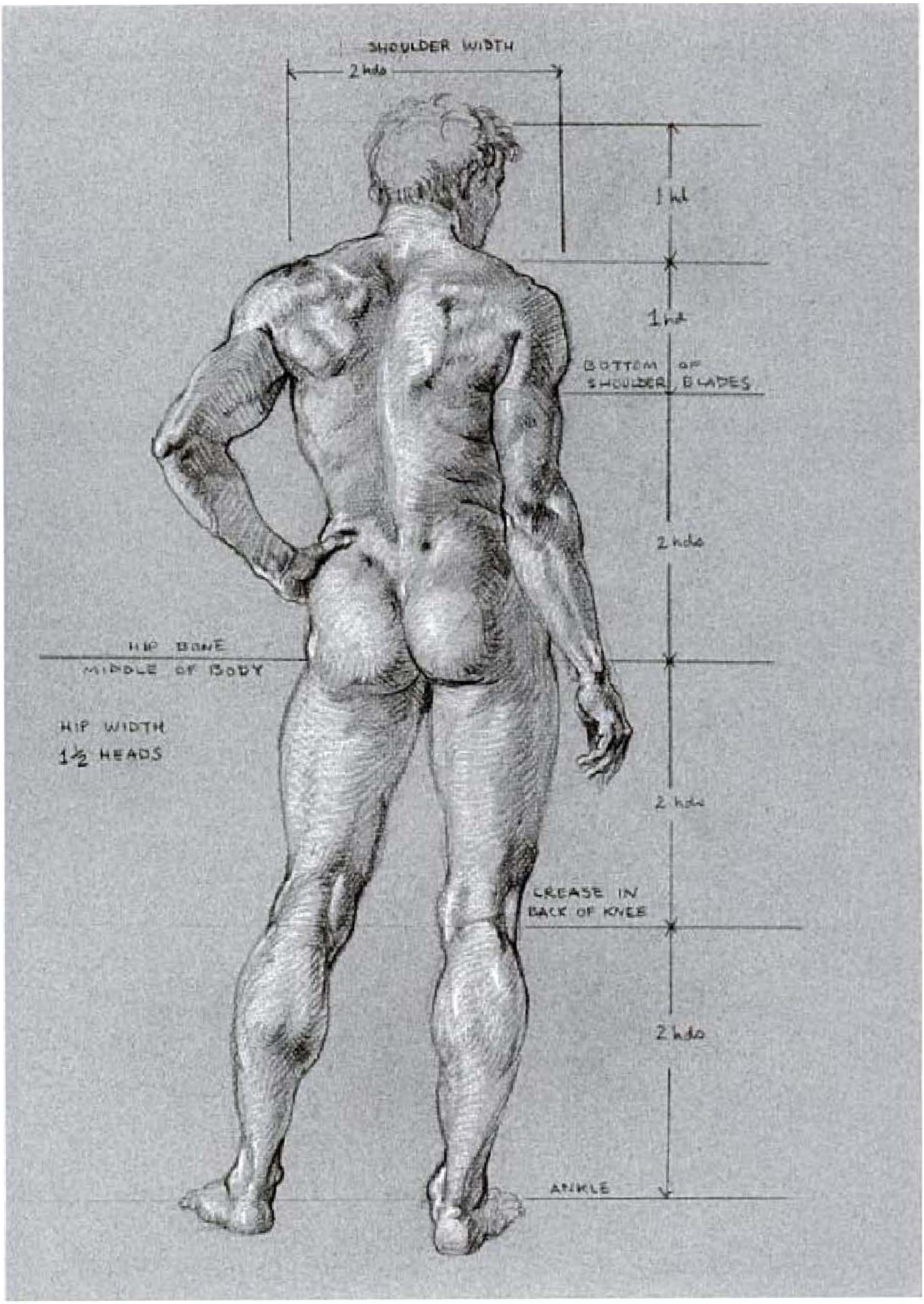
Certain bones project on the surface of the body and become helpful "landmarks" in measuring proportion. These bones are always next to the skin. On a thin body they protrude, on a heavier one they show as dimples.



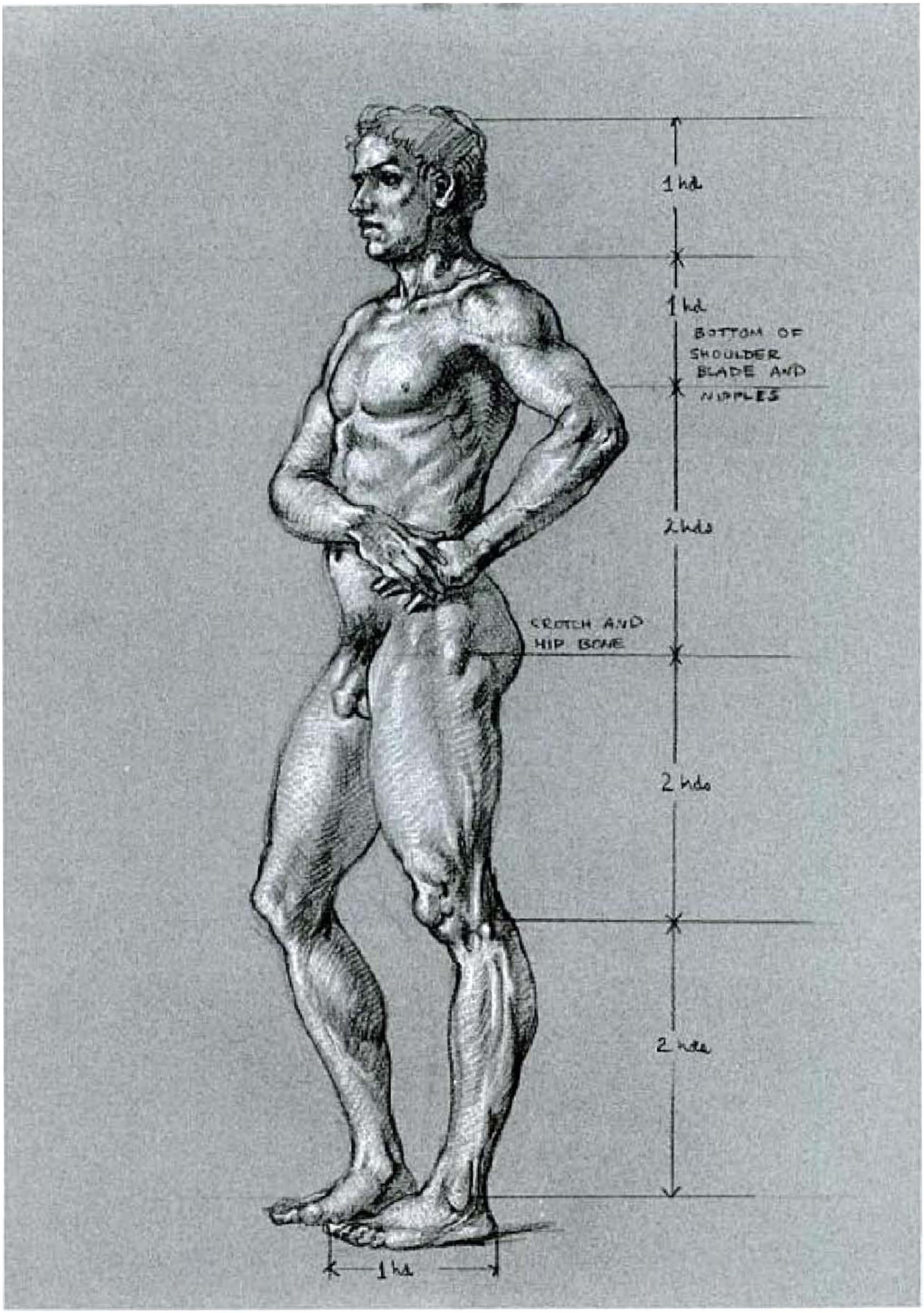
Standing, front view.



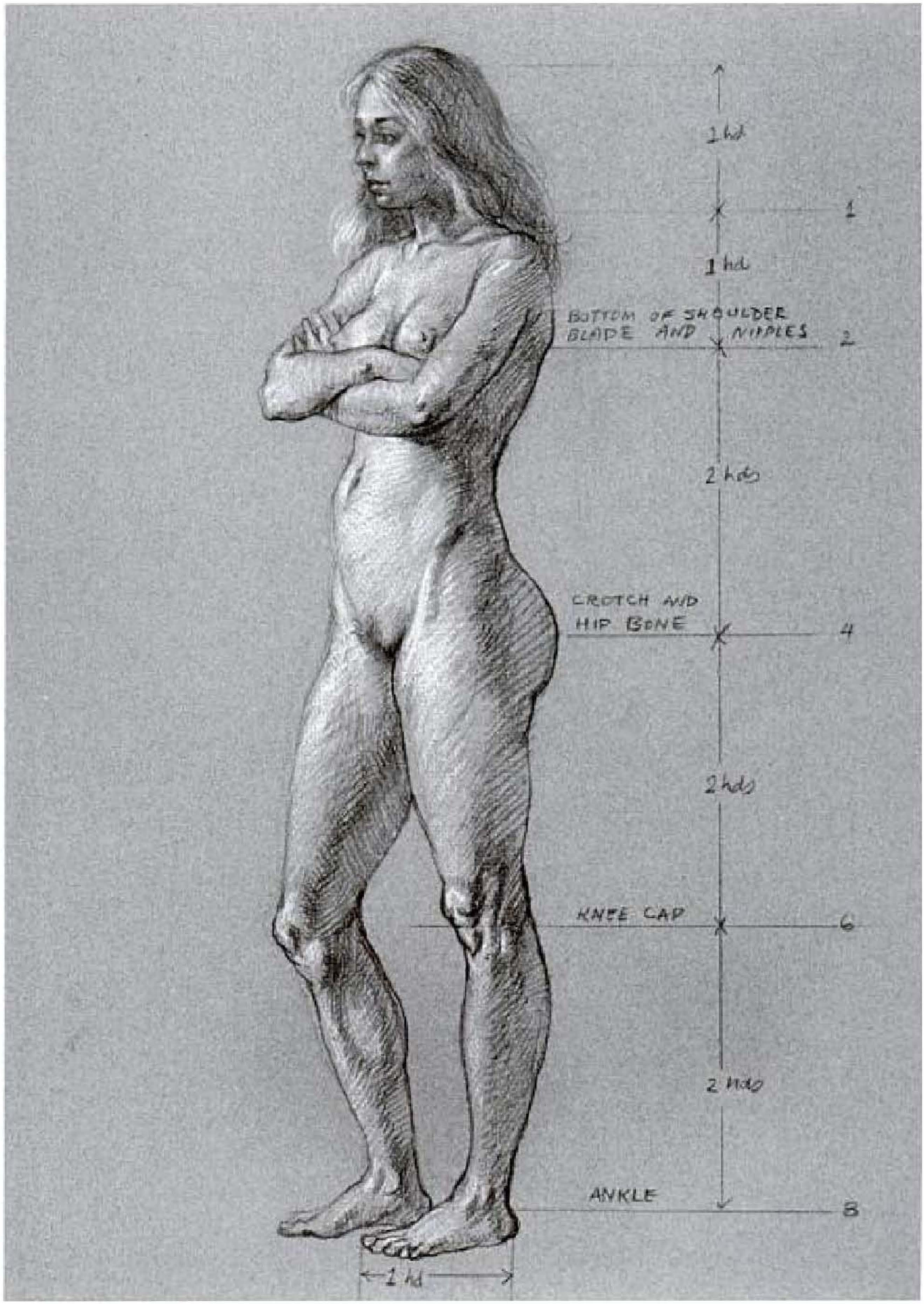
Standing, front view.



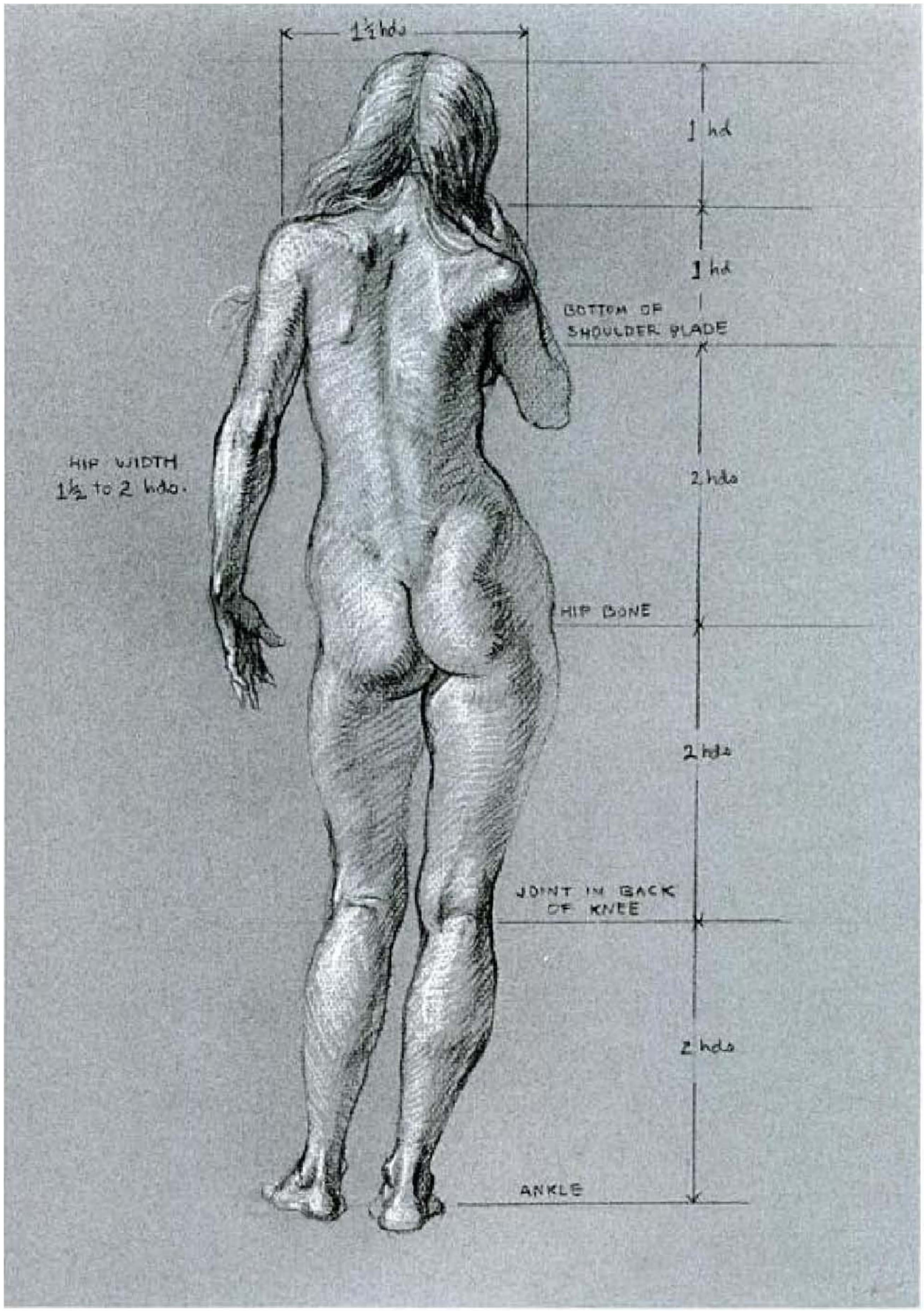
Standing, back view.



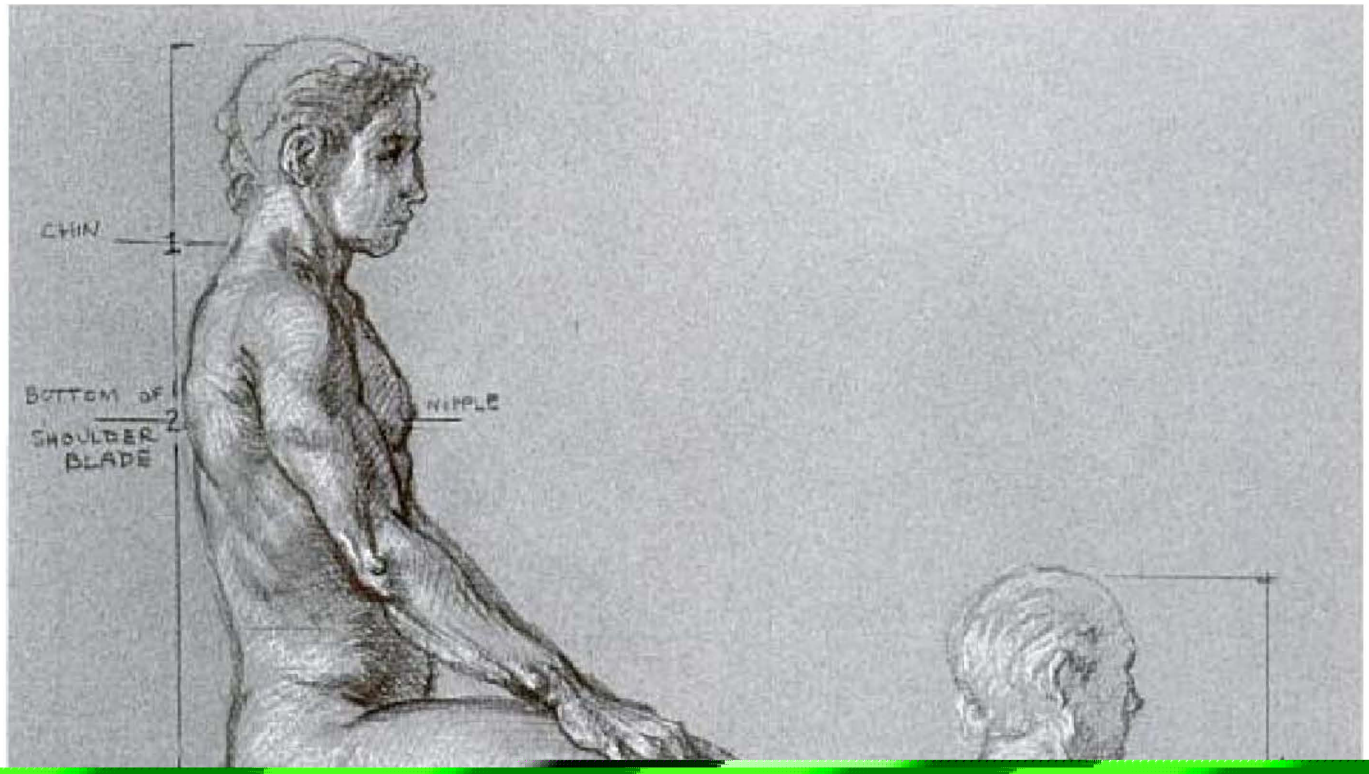
Standing, side view.

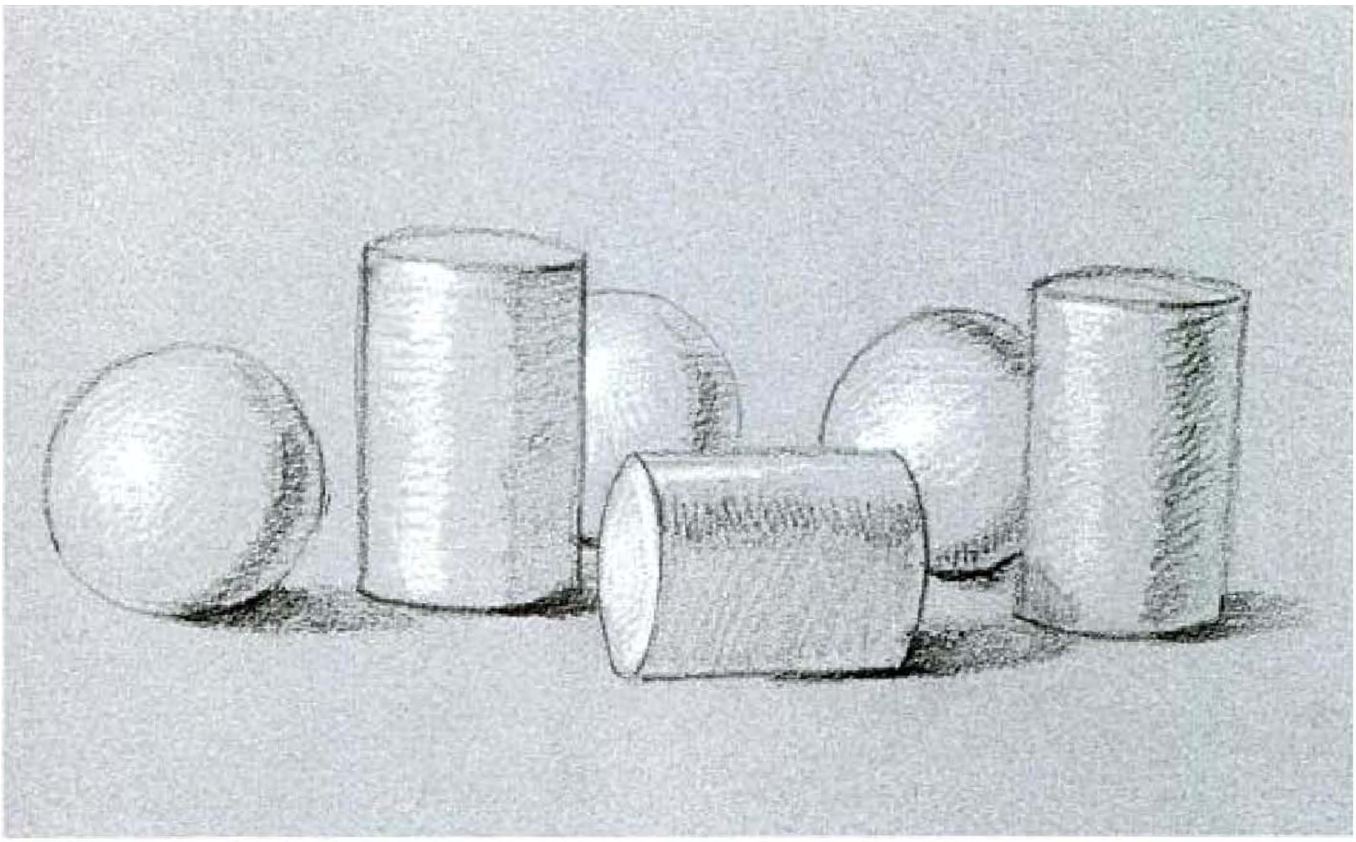


Standing, side view.



Standing, back view.


CHIN
1
BOTTOM OF
SHOULDER
BLADE
2
NIPPLE



A group of objects. The cast shadows explain where objects are in relation to each other.

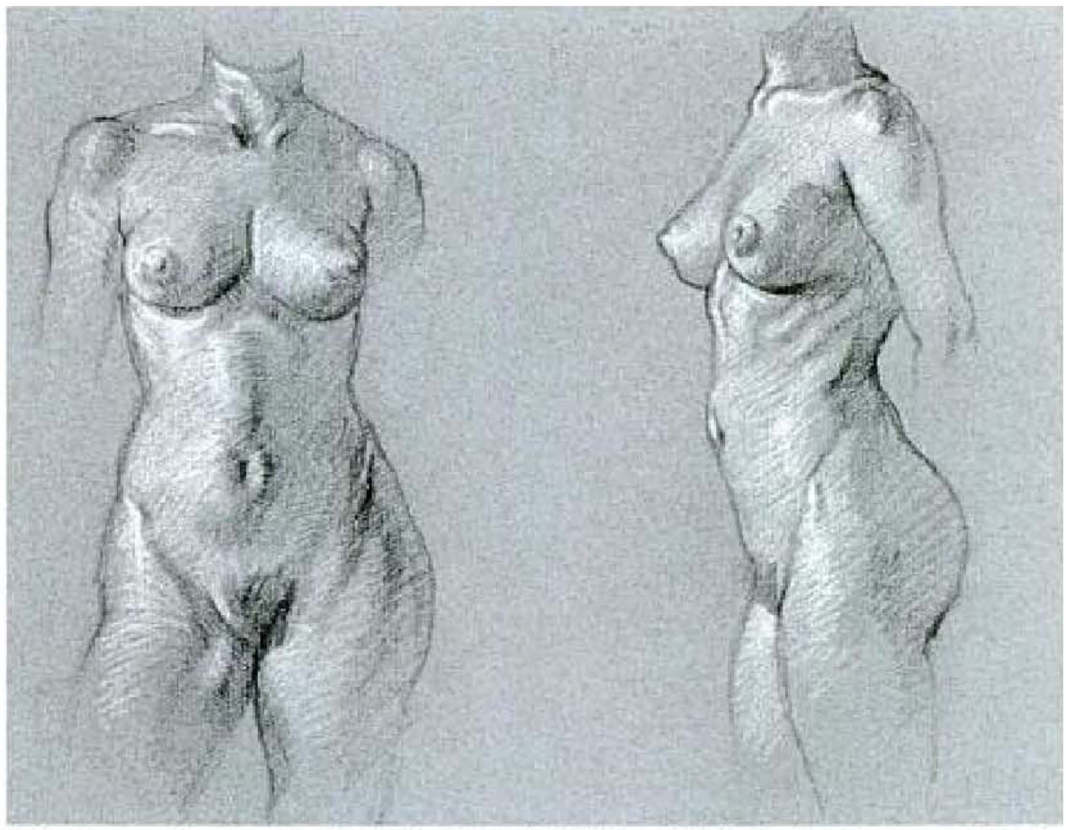
FORMS OF THE FIGURE

III

In discussing the forms of the figure, we have to see what differences there are between male and female. Females usually carry more fat tissue than males, which covers the skeletal and muscular forms and gives a soft, rounded look. The female is narrow in the shoulders and wide at the hips, just the opposite of the male. The bones of both skeletons are the same, but, with the exception of the hips, the female is smaller. The female facial features are finer and more delicate than the male's. The neck is more slender and appears longer and doesn't have a distinct Adam's apple. The collarbone is more horizontal, and muscle bulk is not evident in the chest and shoulders. The breasts sit on top of chest muscles and vary in size and shape. The female waist is higher than the male's and the thighs and buttocks are heavier and smoother. The navel is below the waist and is deepset. The angle of the legs from the hips to the knee is greater in the female and gives her the tendency to appear knock-kneed, while the male tends to appear bowlegged. She has smaller hands and feet, and her body has less hair.

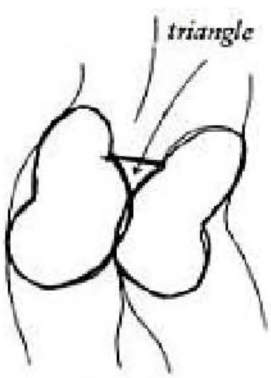
The male jaw is prominent and his nose angular and generous. His neck is thick and his shoulder muscles large, pulling the collar bones upward as they point out towards the shoulder tips. All of this gives his neck a shorter look than the female's. His feet and hands are larger in proportion to his body. He may have a noticeable beard, as well as a thin coat of body hair that becomes dense on his chest, pubic area, and under his arms.

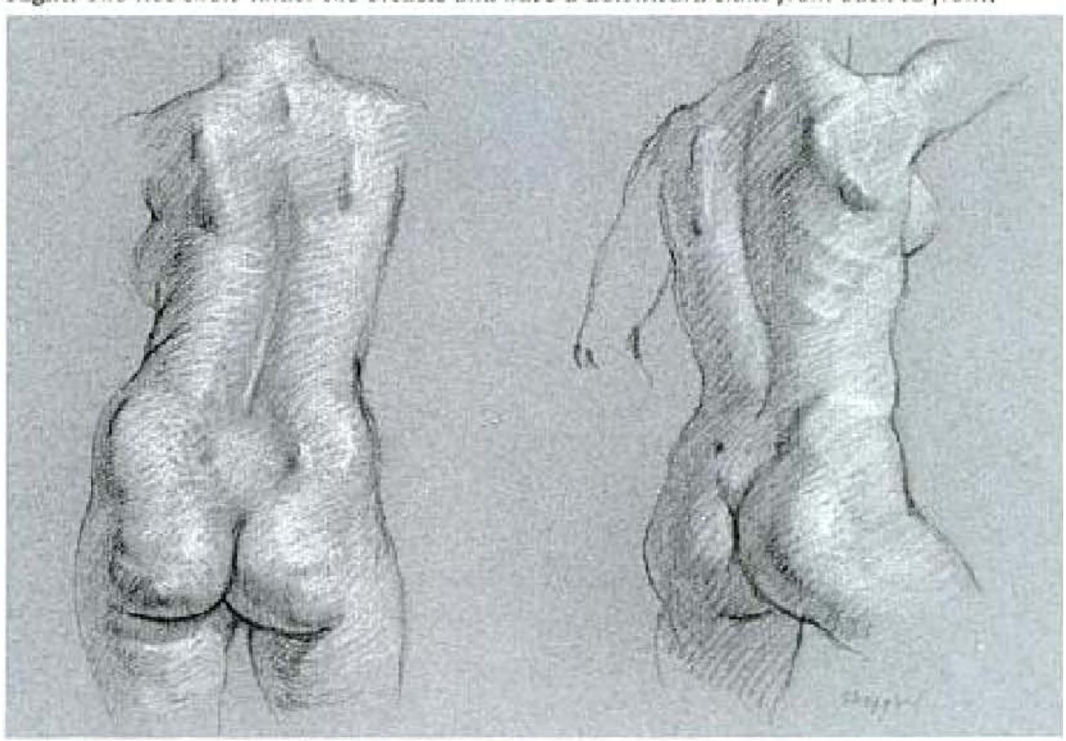
The male skeleton is larger, and the muscles more developed than the female's. Also, the male figure carries less body fat, which gives him a more angular look. His shoulders are wide and his hips narrow.



Left: *The navel is deepset in the belly. The waist is high and the belly sits into the pelvic basin. The two front points on the pelvis project forward.*

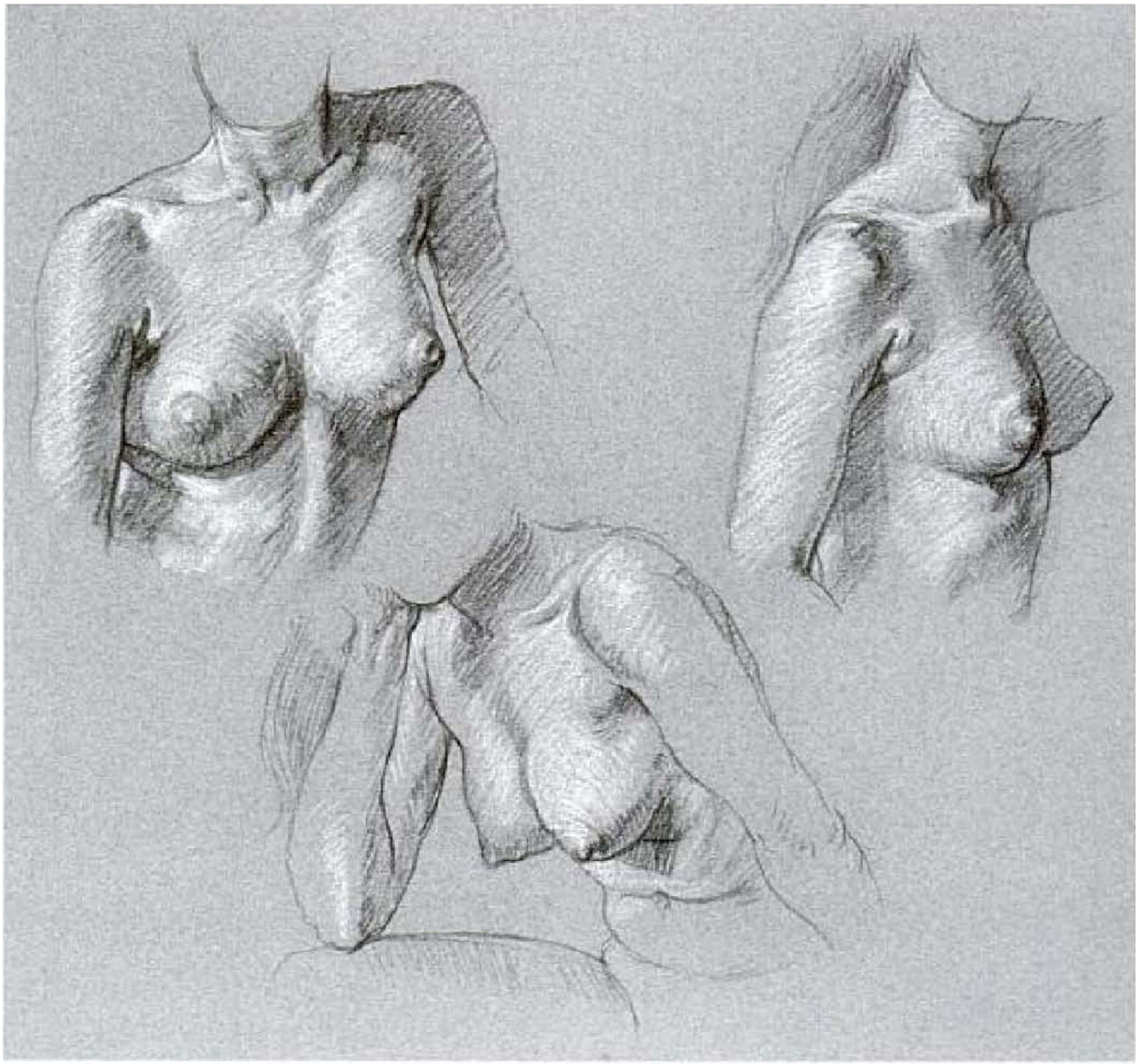
Right: *The ribs show under the breasts and have a downward slant from back to front.*

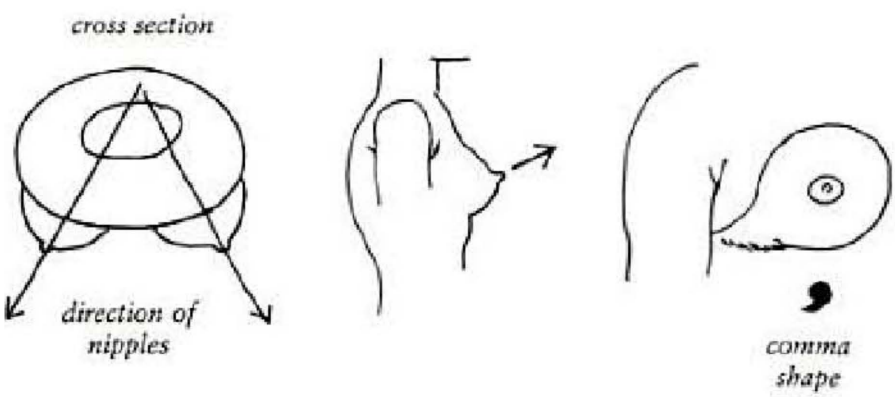




Left: *The muscles and fat of the buttocks create a butterfly shape (see diagram at left). At the base of the spine, between the two cheeks, there is a triangular shape formed by two dimples and the crease between the buttocks.*

Right: *The shoulder bones show on the surface and move with the arm. At the base of the neck the vertebrae are visible.*

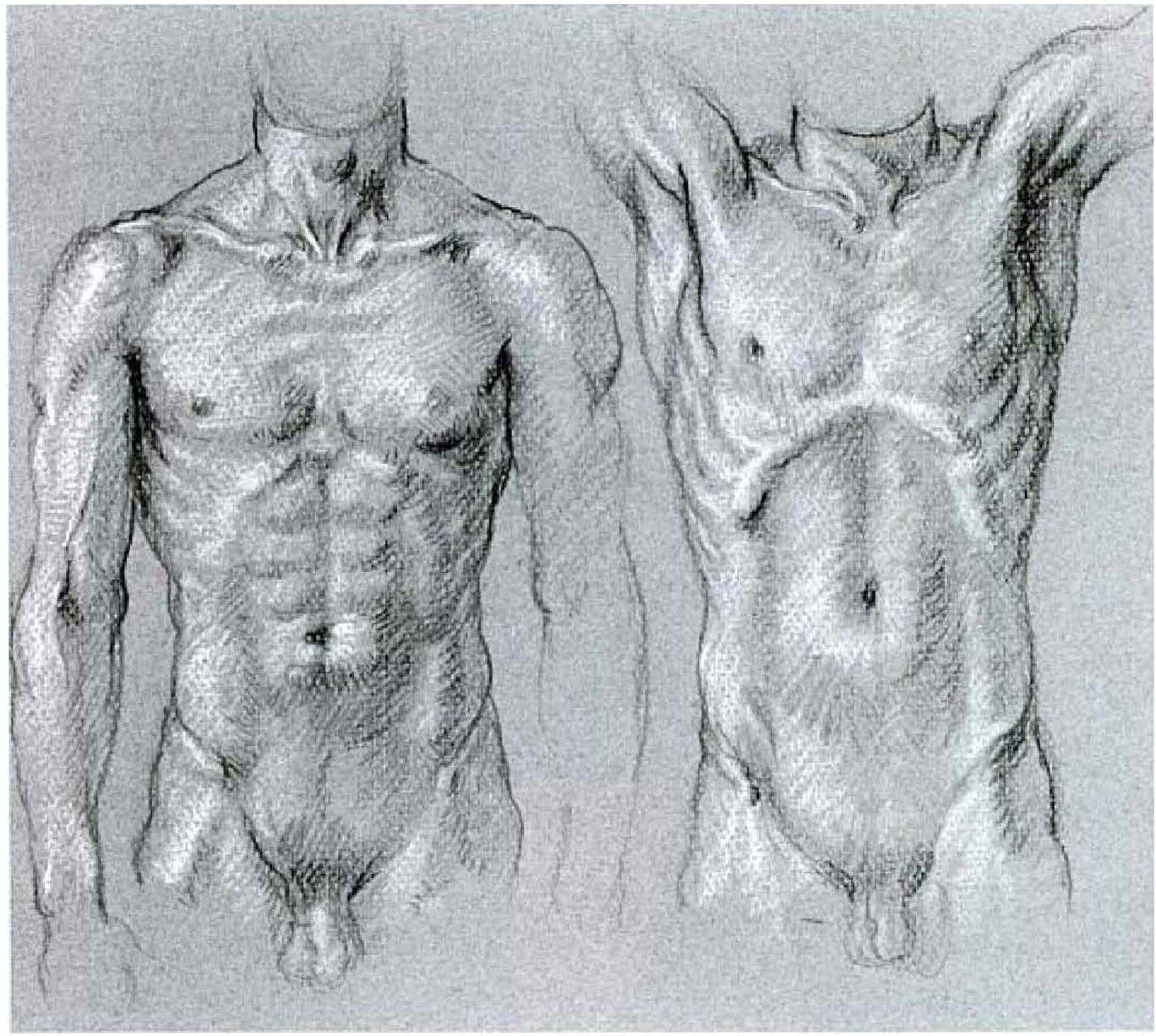


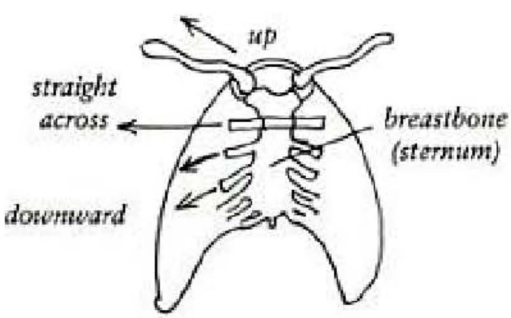


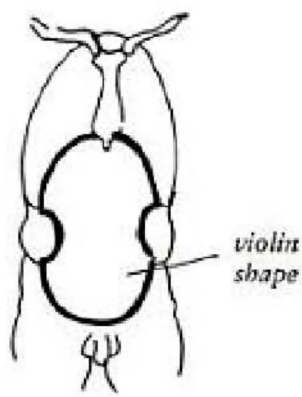
Top left: *The breasts are wider than they are high. The nipples point outward from the middle and slightly upward (see diagrams at left). The neck is a cylindrical shape that fits into the torso behind the collarbones.*

Center: *The breasts attach loosely to the underlying chest muscles. The chest muscles extend into the arm, forming the front wall of the armpit.*

Top right: *Fat extending behind the breast toward the armpit creates a comma shape (see diagram at left). The top outline of the breast is a long, slow curve to the nipple. The bottom outline is a short, sharp curve.*

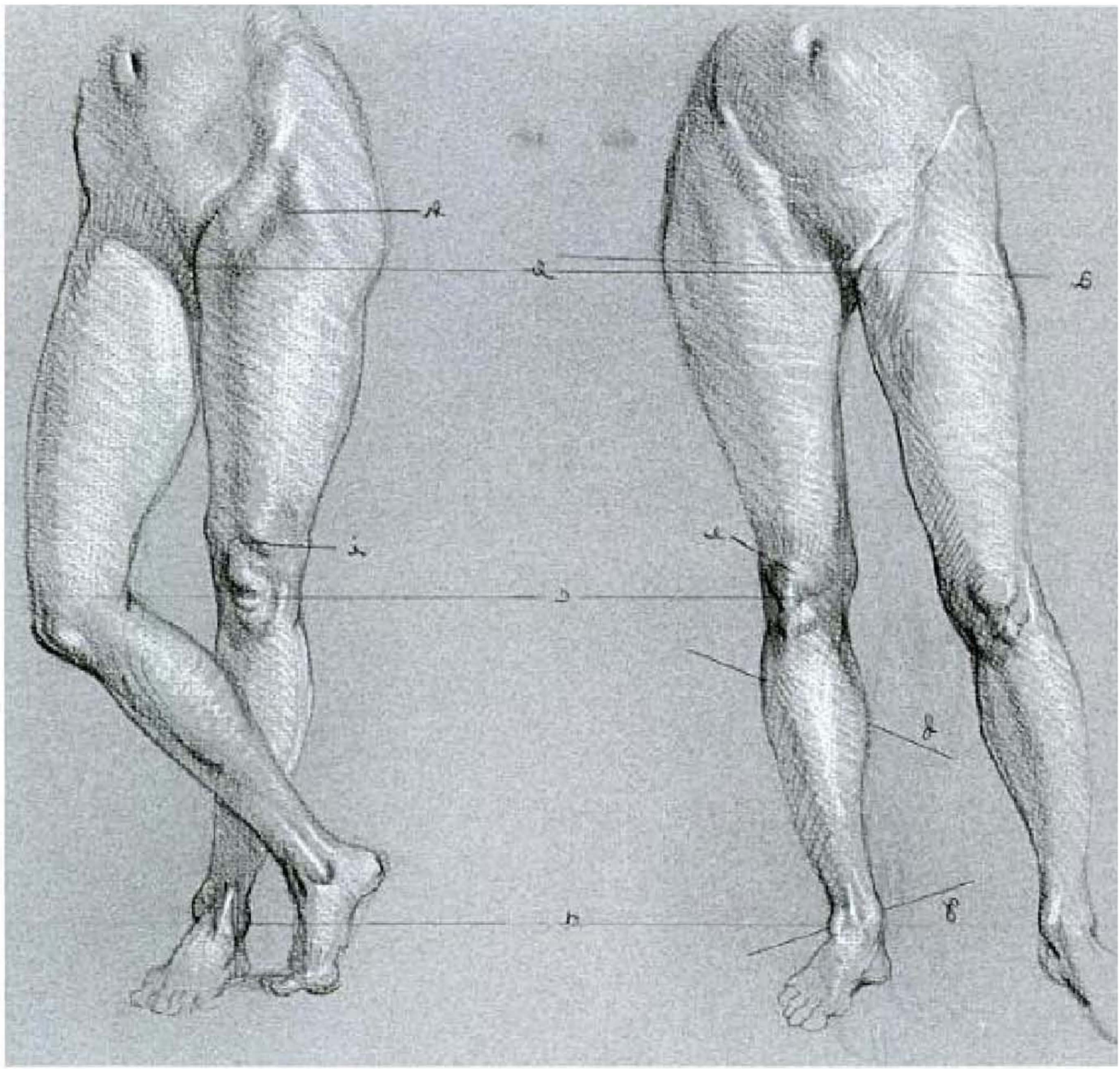


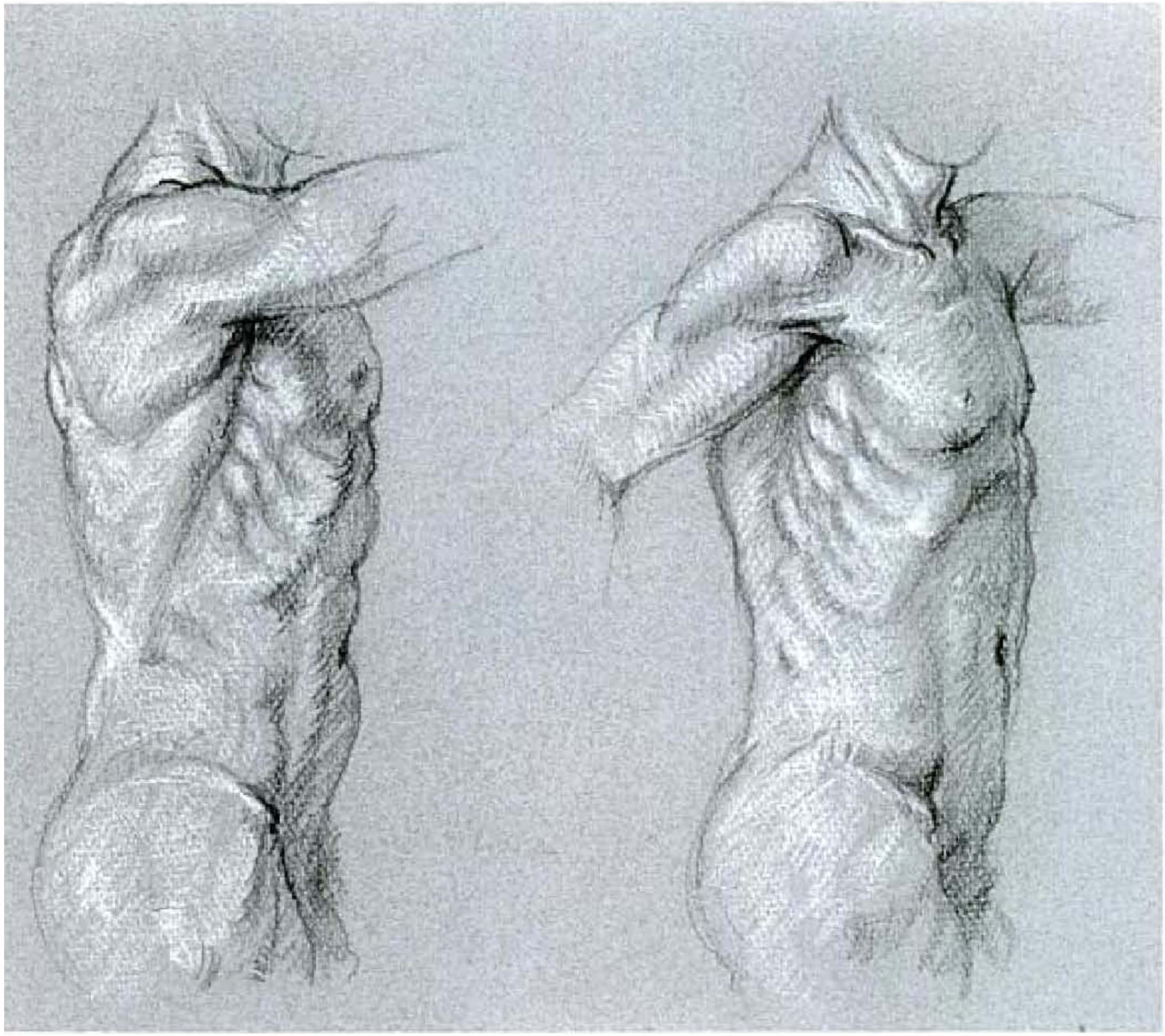


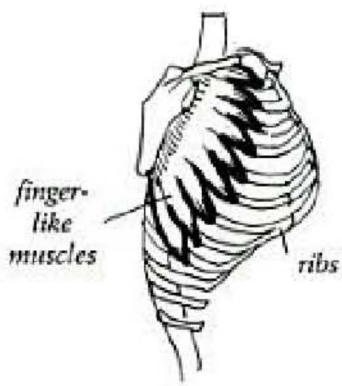


Left: *The collarbones angle upward away from the base of the neck. The ribs attach to the breastbone or sternum. The rib cage and pelvic basin form a violin shape (see diagrams at left).*

Right: *The chest muscles flatten and stretch up into the arms. The ribs start high in the back and extend downward toward the front. The rib cage becomes prominent when the arms are raised.*

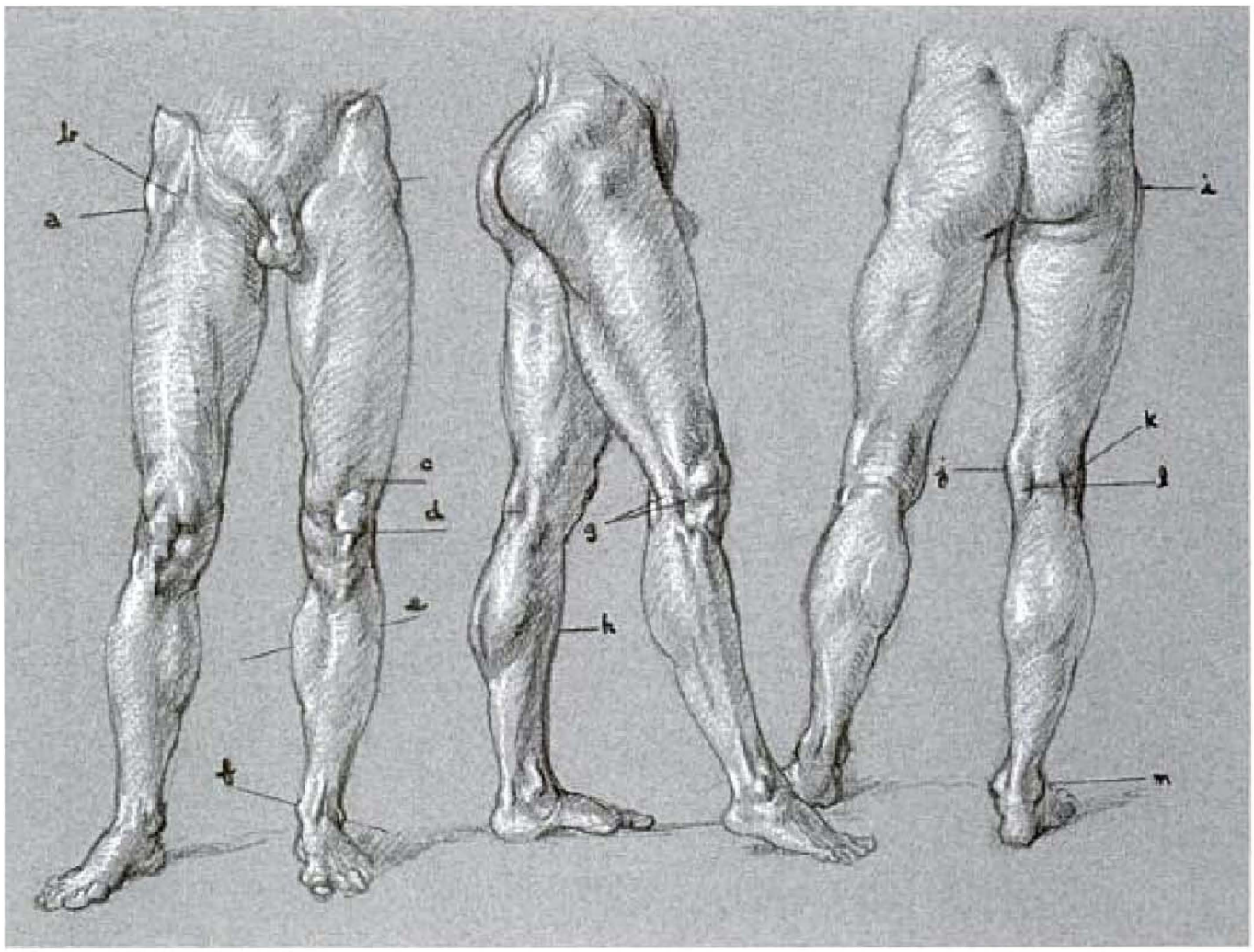

A
a
B
c
D
d
b
g





Left: *Small finger-like muscles attach to the ribs on the side of the rib cage, making a break in the line of their downward slant (see diagram at left). When the arm is raised forward, it's obvious the muscles of the back extend into the arm.*

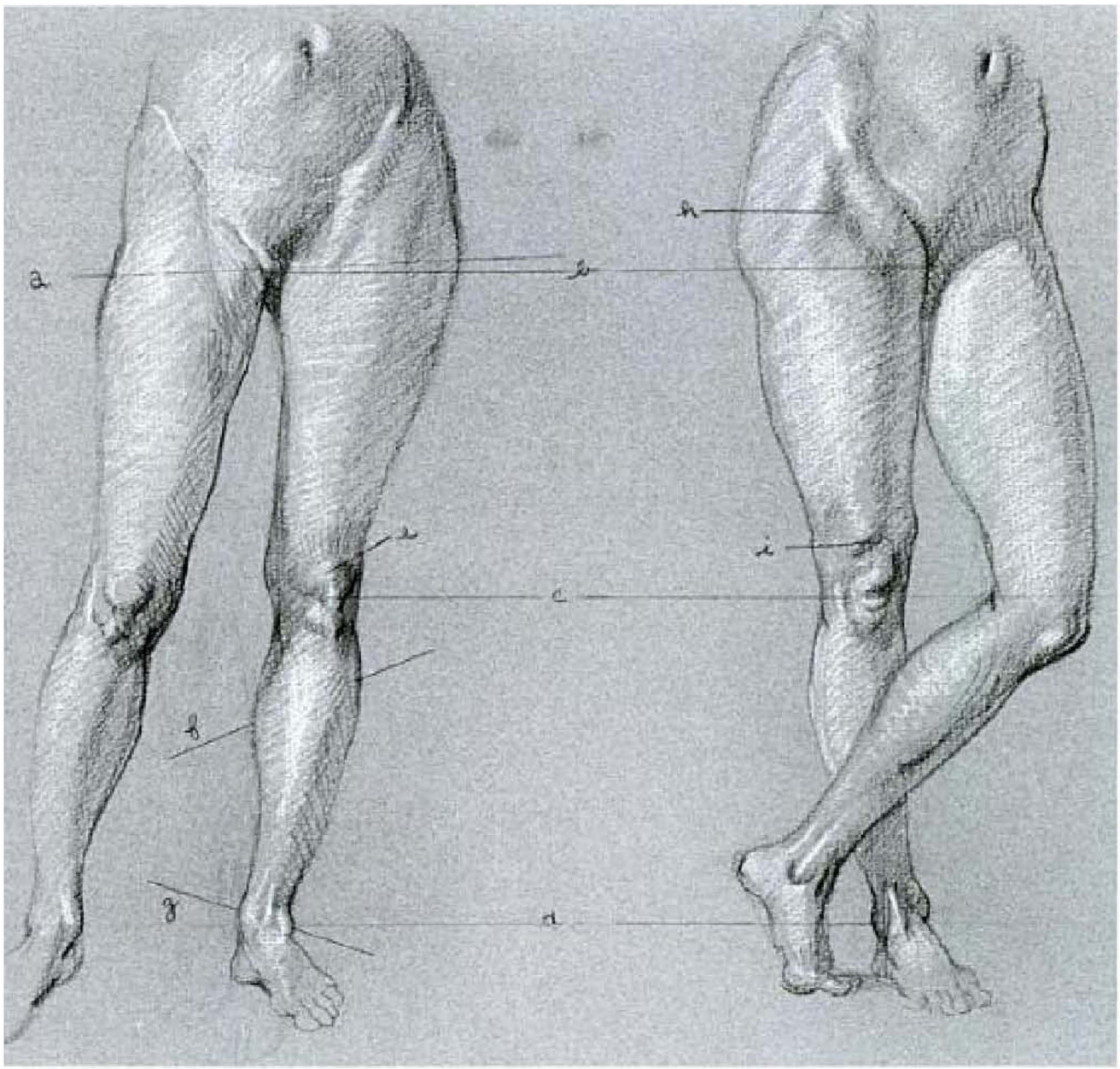
Right: *When the arm is pulled back, the chest muscle forming the front wall of the armpit extends out into the arm.*



Left: *The angle (a) is the midpoint of the body and goes from one hipbone through the pubic area to the other hipbone. Muscles attached to the pelvis create an upside-down V shape (b). The locked knee creates a depression above the kneecap (c). The kneecap is rounded and its bottom is the sixth head measurement (d). The outside of the calf is higher than the inside (e). The angle (f) of the ankle runs the opposite way, with the inside of the ankle high and the outside low.*

Center: *Two strap-like tendons from the upper leg attach to the top of the lower leg on the outside of the knee (g). The front of the shin has a slight S shape (h).*

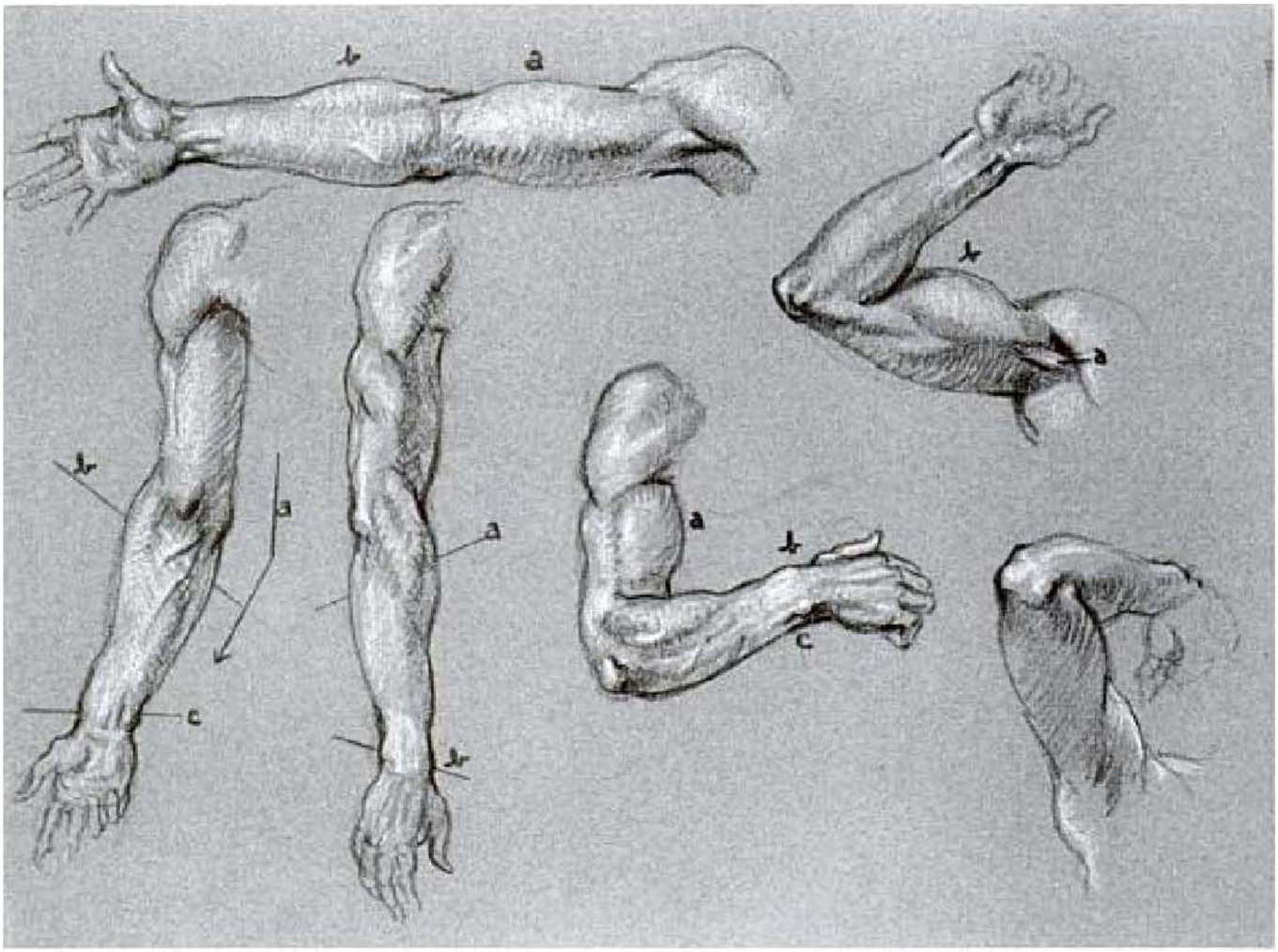
Right: *The hipbone protrudes on the male figures (i). The inside of the knee has a sharp angle to it (j). The tendons on the back of the knee and the folding crease form the letter H (k). The midpoint of the leg (l) is the sixth head measurement. The ankle is the eighth head measurement and the inside is higher than the outside (m).*





Above left: *Angle (a) is the midpoint of the body. The kneecap is a round shape that rests on line (c), which is the midpoint between the hipbone (b) and the ankle (d). Beneath the kneecap is another round, fatty shape (e). The outside of the calf is higher than the inside, making angle (f). The inside of the ankle is higher than the outside, forming the opposite angle (g). Starting with the hipbone, a muscle runs obliquely across the leg down to the inside of the knee. A spiral line is formed by continuing down the shinbone of the lower part of the leg to the inside of the ankle (see diagram at left).*

Above right: *When the leg is tensed, muscles attached to the pelvis make an upside-down V shape (h). The locked knee also causes a depression above the kneecaps (i). The inside of the ankle is farther forward than the outside.*



Top left: *The biceps of the arm (a) emerge from underneath the shoulder muscles. The top of the forearm makes a high silhouette (b).*

Lower left: *When the palm of the hand is forward, the forearm angles away*

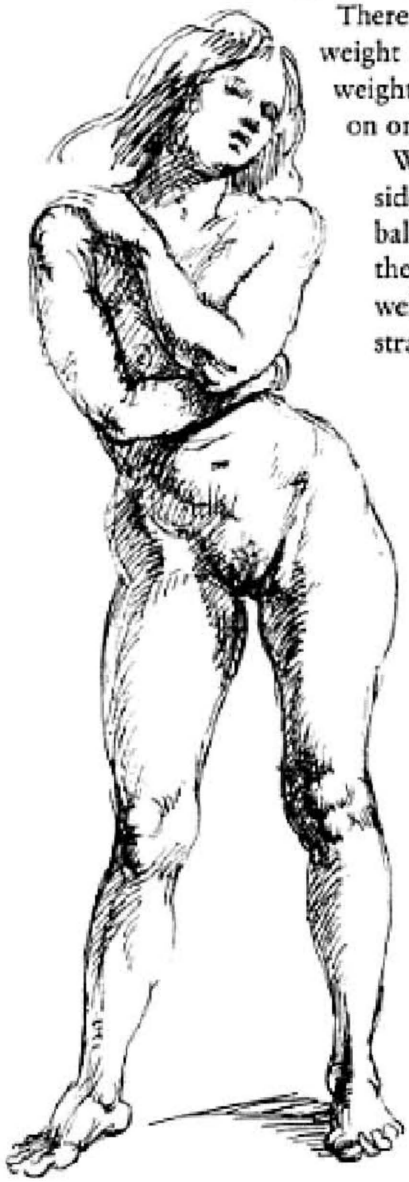
THE STANDING FIGURE

IV

When the standing figure is drawn there is less use of foreshortening than in most other poses, enabling the artist to use the standard eight-heads measurement easily.

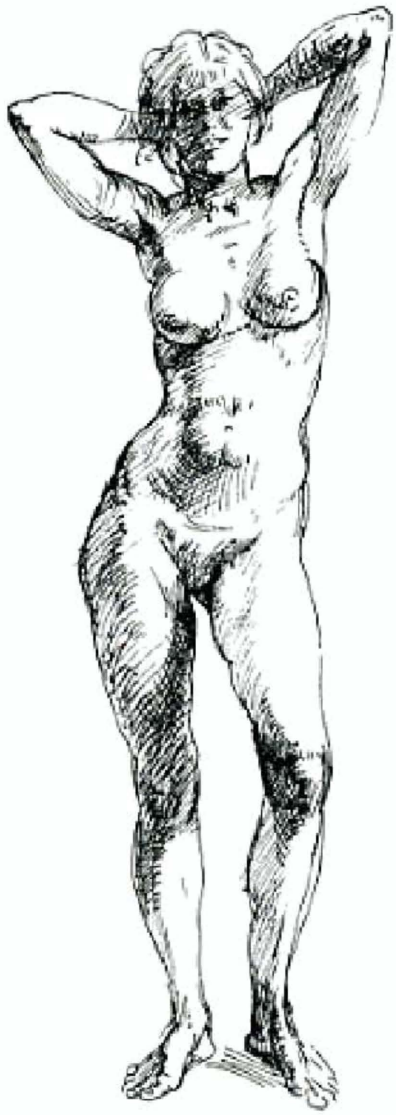
There are three basic ways a figure can stand: with all the weight on one leg and balanced with the other, with the weight evenly distributed on both legs, or with the weight on one leg and the other leg raised.

When the weight is on one leg, it throws the hip on that side higher than the other. The shoulders then usually balance the figure by making an opposite angle, giving the figure the classic contrapposto stance. When the weight is equal on both legs, the shoulders are usually straight across.

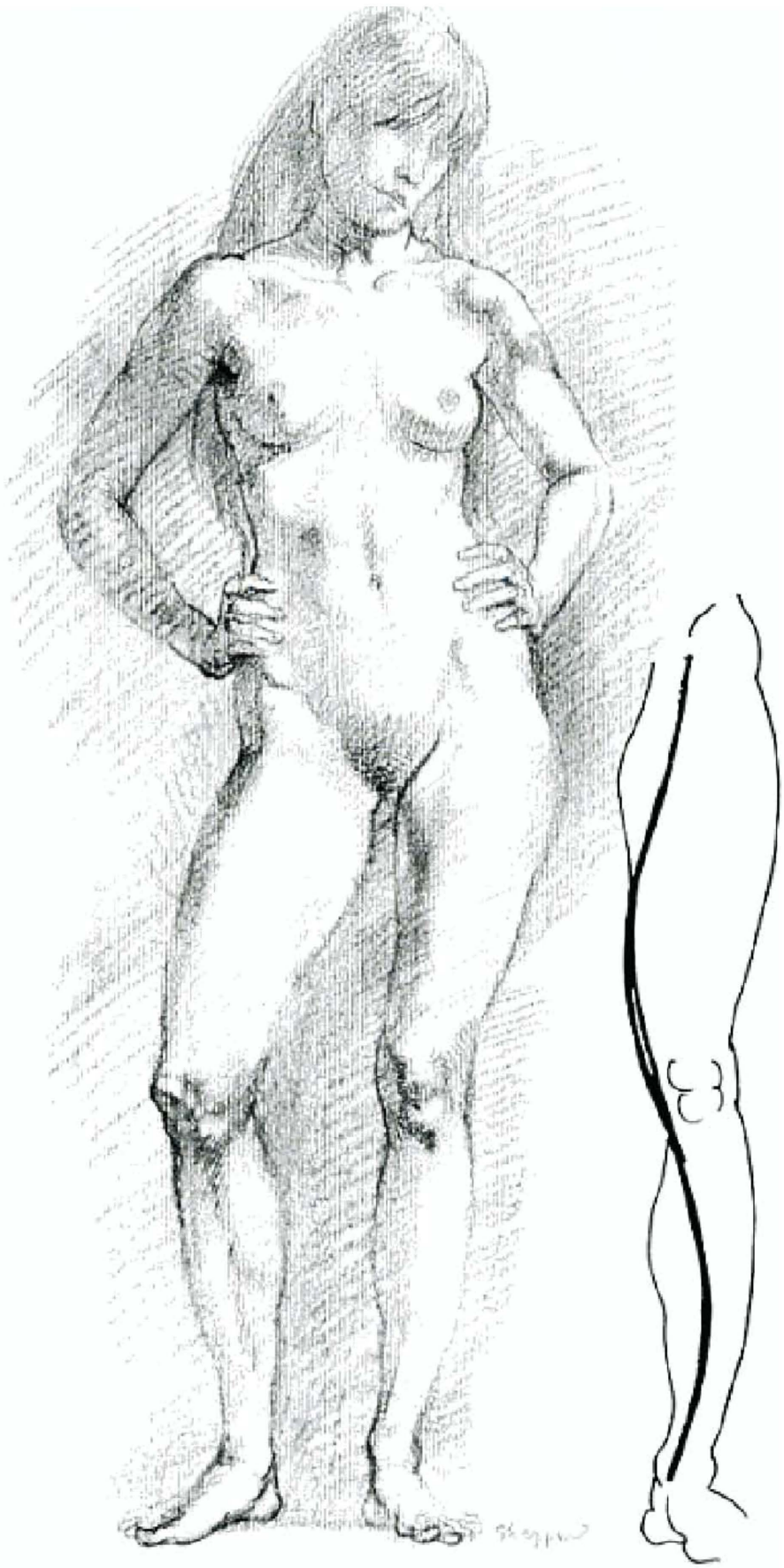




The kneecap is round, like a silver dollar, and beneath it is a similar fatty shape. The outside of the calf makes a smoother but higher silhouette than the inside, creating an angle from the outside down to the inside. The ankle has an opposite angle (see diagram at left).

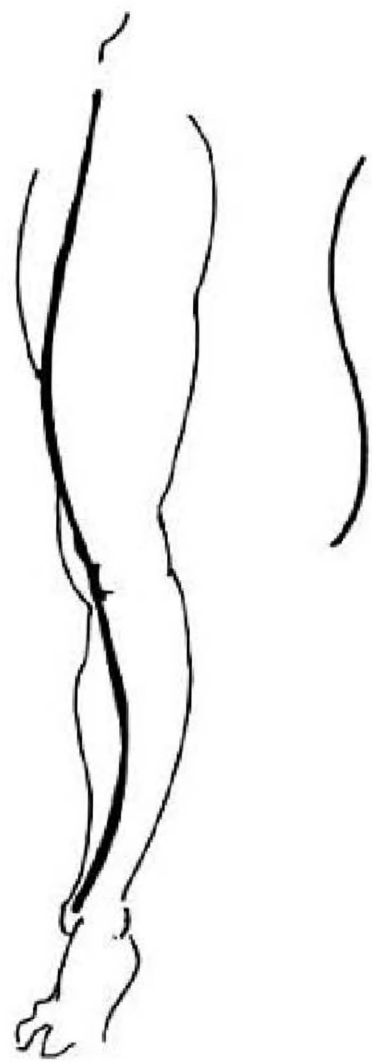


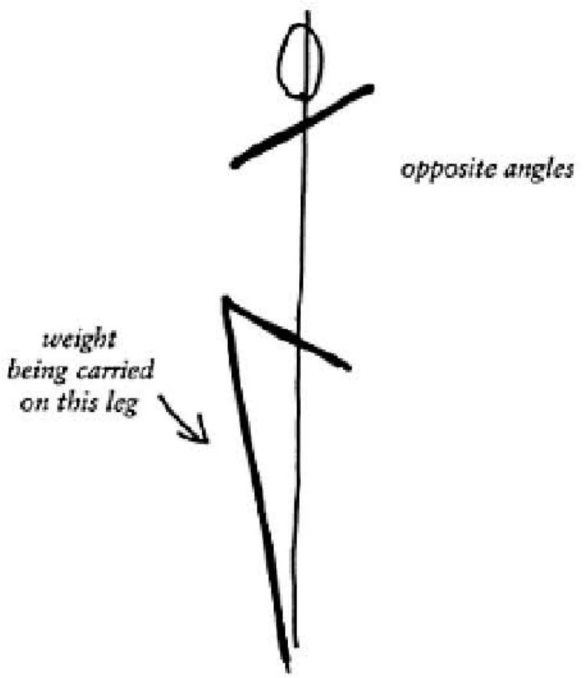
Above: *The neck sits into the center of the torso, with the shoulder muscles in back of it and the collarbones in front. The second rib attaches to the breastbone and shows as a horizontal line across the chest. Fat over the pelvic ridge makes the waist higher on women than on men.*

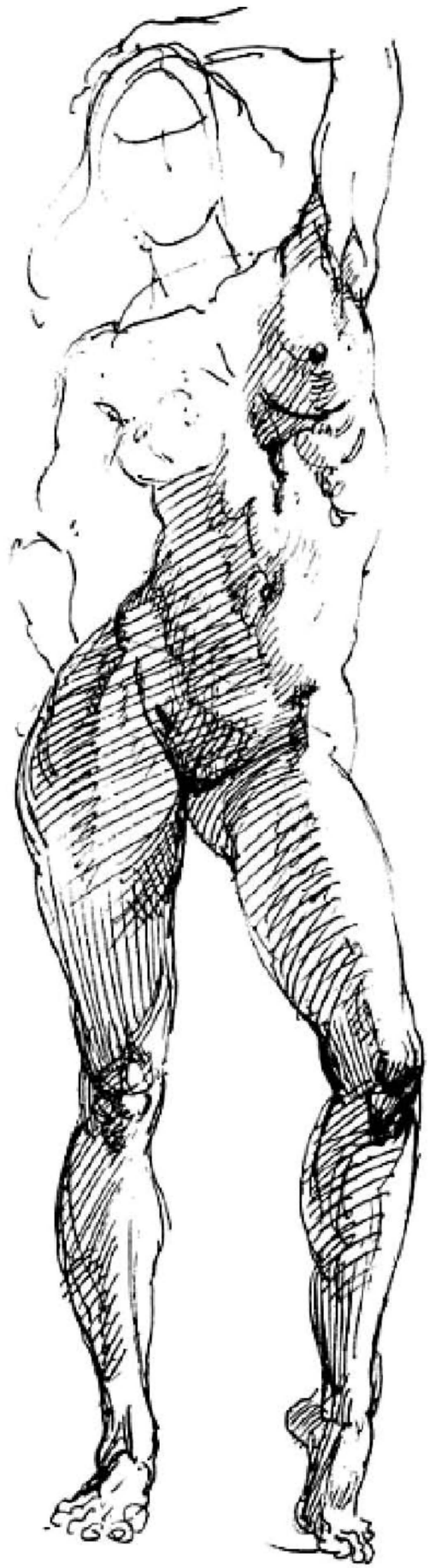


Right: *On the left thigh, a shadow from a muscle descends down to the inside of the knee and makes a continuous spiral down the edge of the shinbone to the inside of the ankle (see diagram far right). The inside of the ankle is always higher than the outside.*

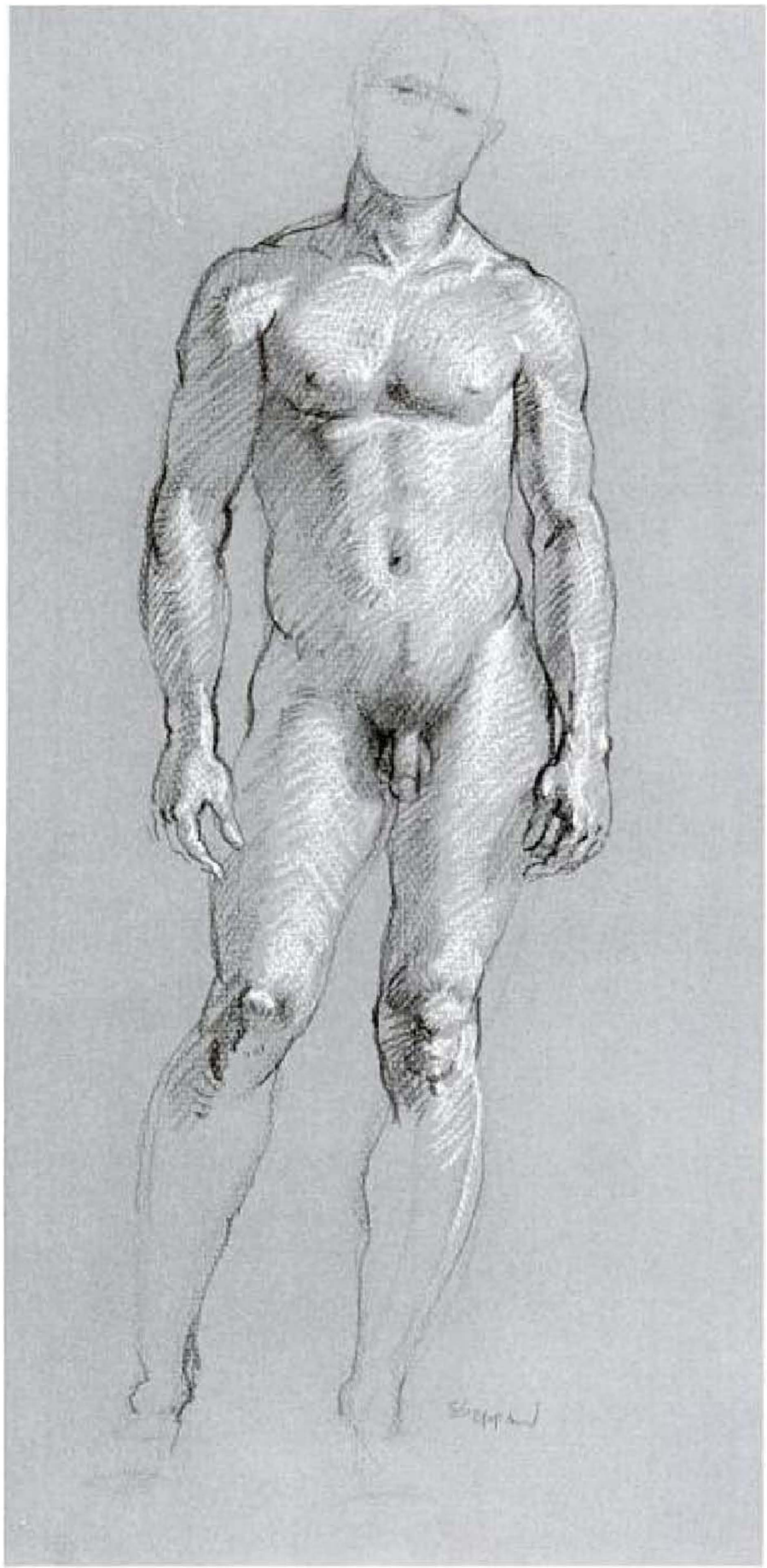
The left leg is locked, pushing the knee back. This puts the leg in an S shape (see diagram below). The outside of the right forearm rises above the elbow, which is prominent on the inside of the arm.

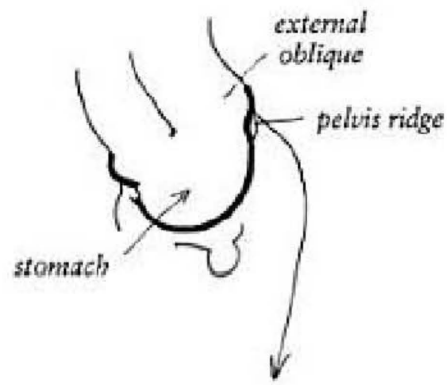




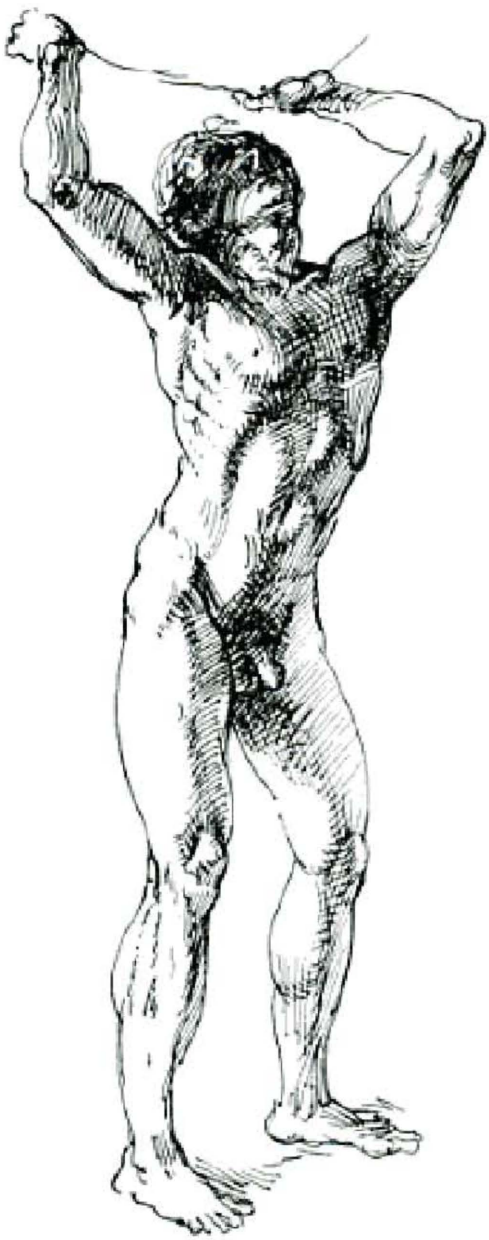


The weight of the torso is on the right leg, which forces the right hip higher than the left. The left leg is used to balance the figure. The shoulders slant in the opposite direction from the hips. This attitude is called contrapposto (see diagram above).

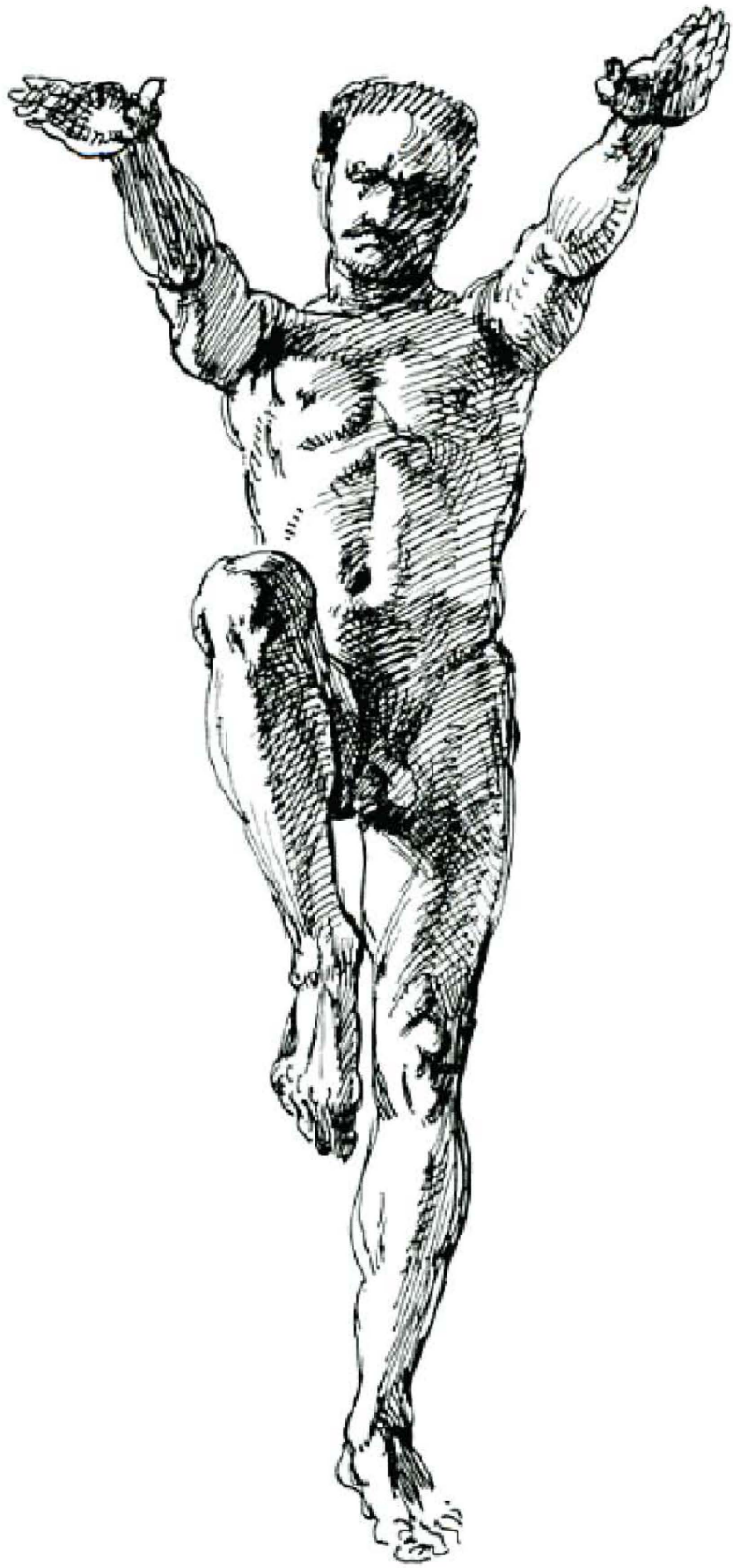




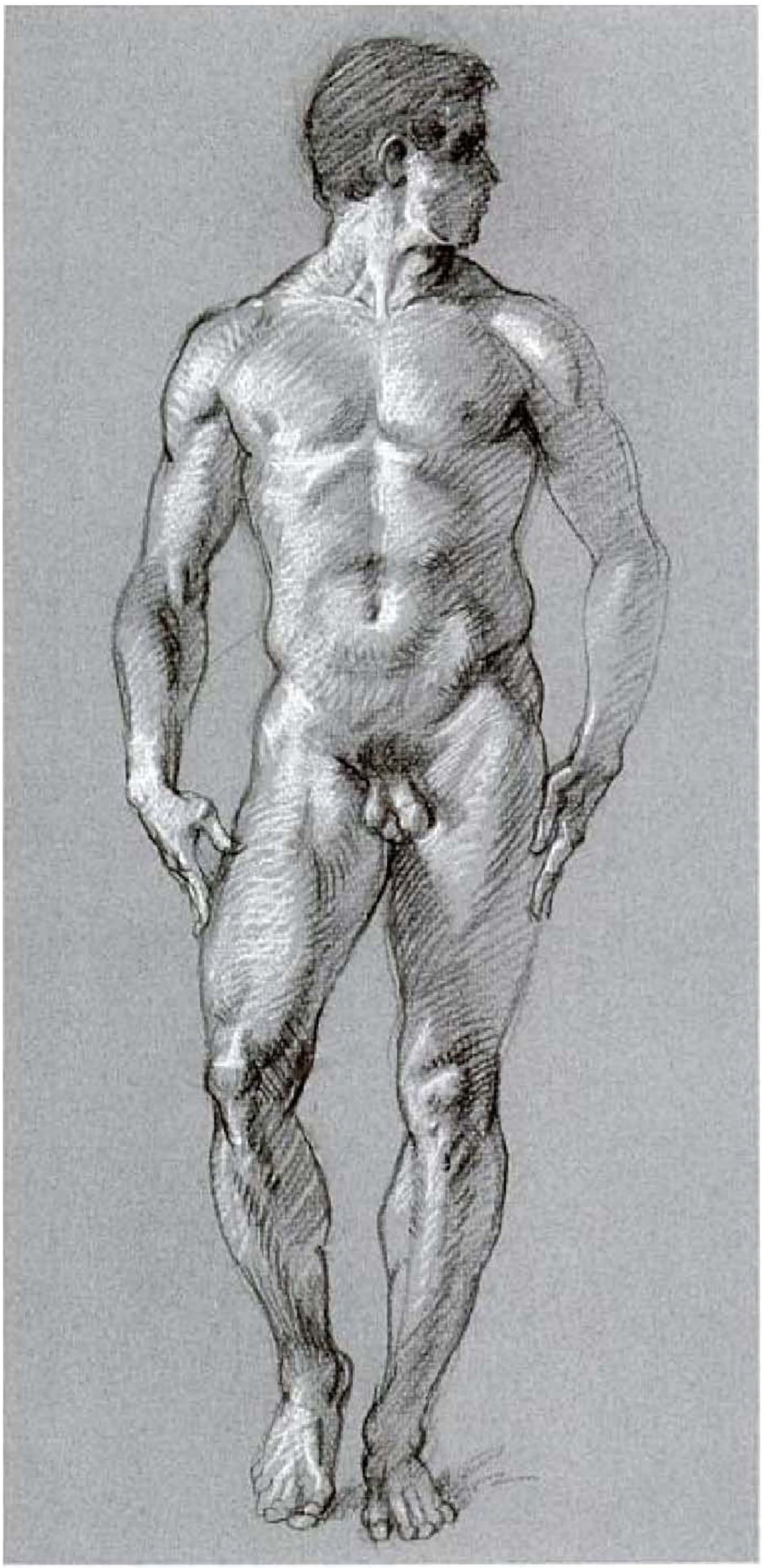
The model's weight is on his left leg and his shoulders and hips are at opposite angles. The external oblique muscles overlap the pelvic ridge and the stomach fits down into the basin of the pelvis (see diagram).

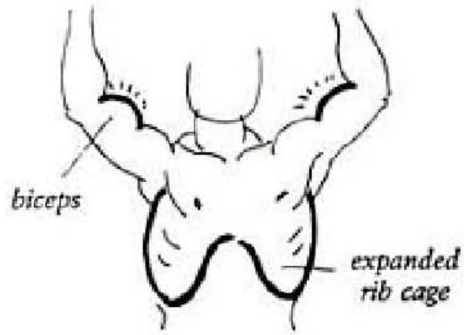


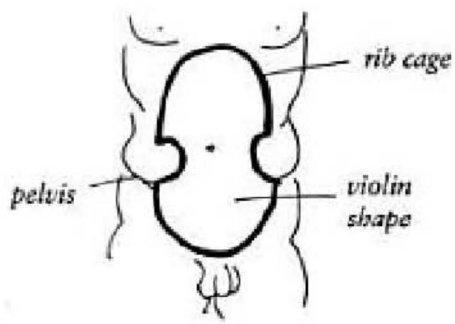
When the arms are raised, the serratus muscles show like fingers connecting to the ribs. Muscles attaching from the pelvis form an upside-down V shape on the upper part of the thigh.



When the leg is bent, the inside of the knee is higher and rounder than the outside. The kneecap is prominent and the shape of the ridge of bone beneath it is triangular. The foreshortened arms are mostly explained by overlapping lines.

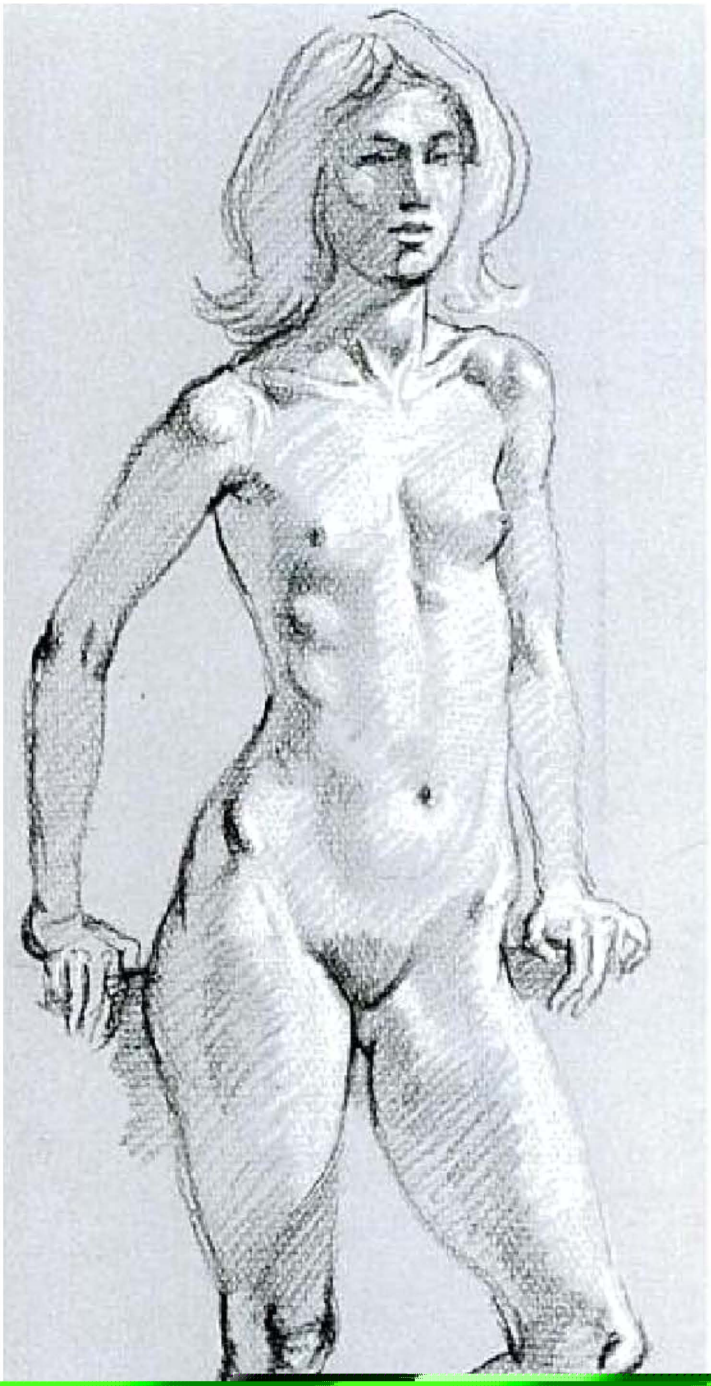


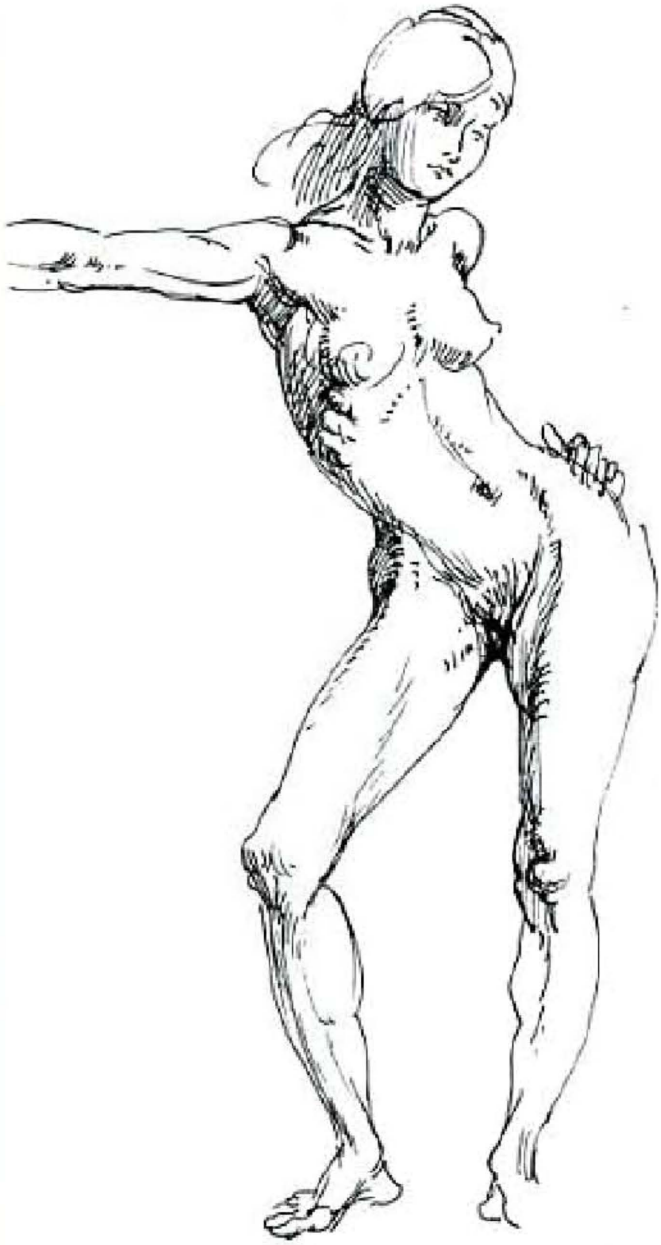




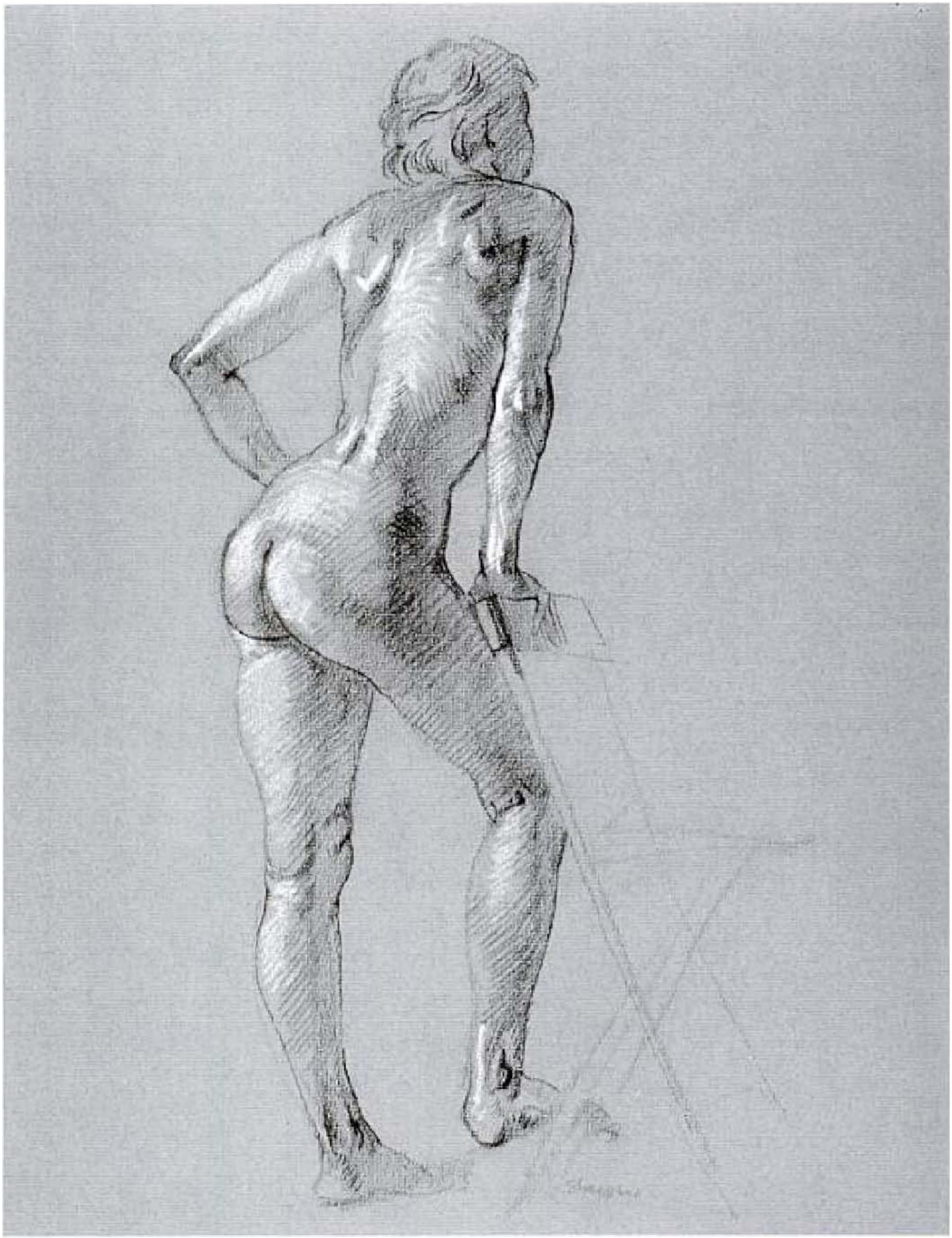


A large violin shape is created on the front of the torso by the hollow of the rib cage and the ridge of the pelvis. The inside of the ankle is higher than the outside and at the knee the outside of the lower leg is higher than the inside (see diagrams above).

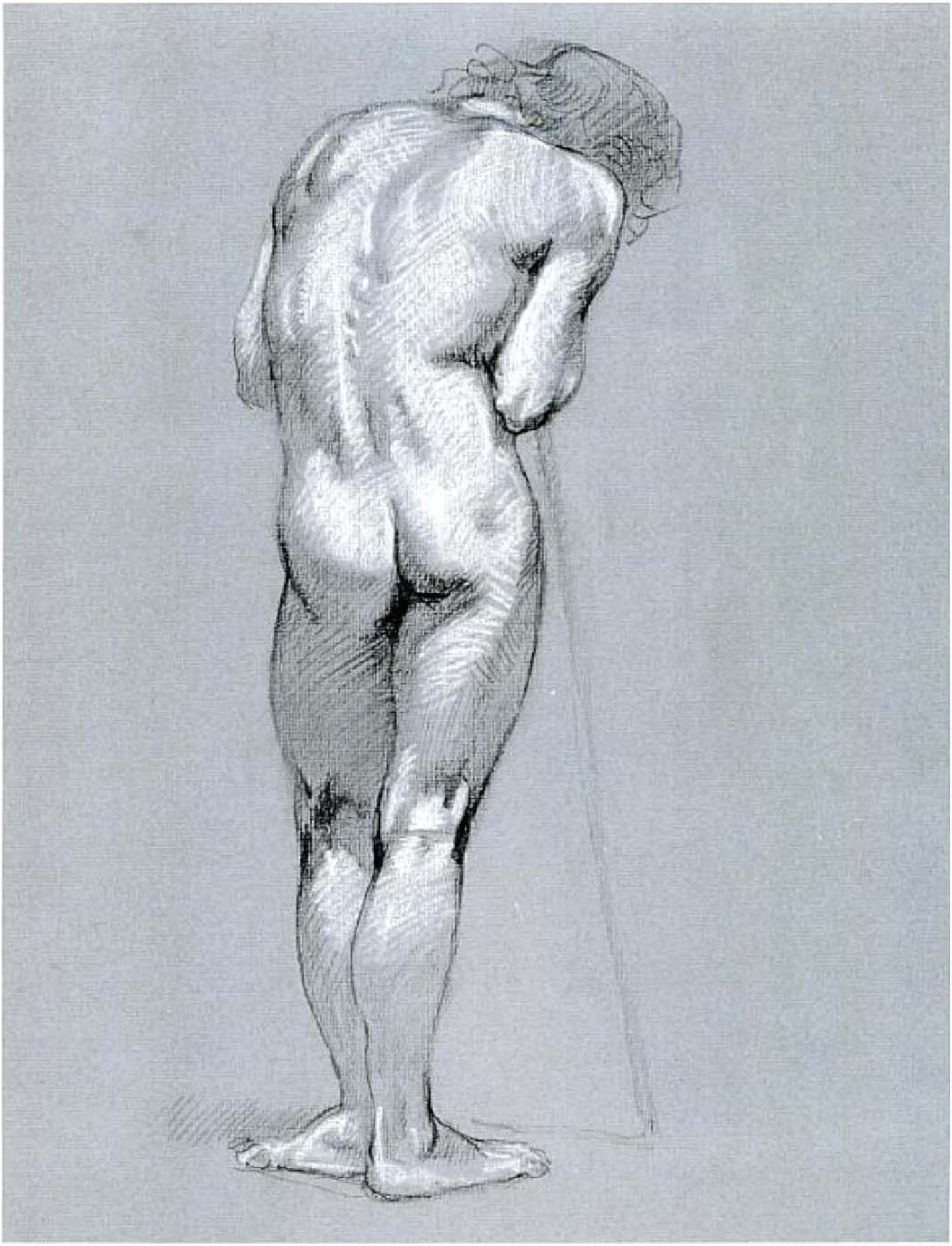




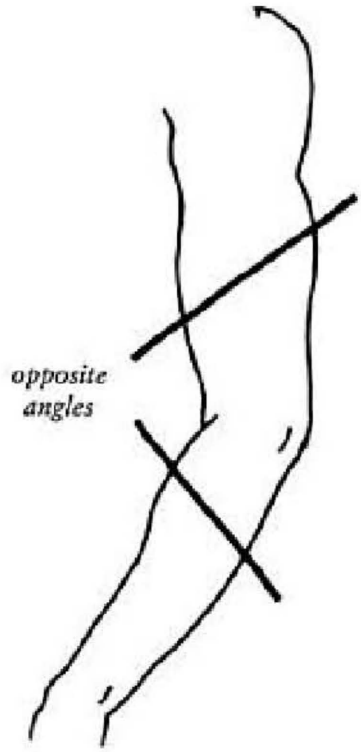
Above: *The chest muscles go out into the arms and form the front wall of the armpit. The breasts rest on top of these muscles. The inside of the*



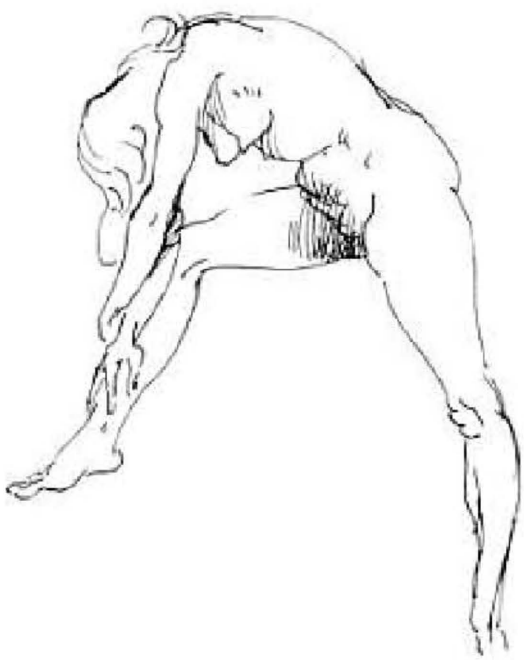
The weight of the figure is evenly distributed between the supporting leg and the chair, balancing the center of gravity between the two supports. The upward angle of the ribs is quite evident.



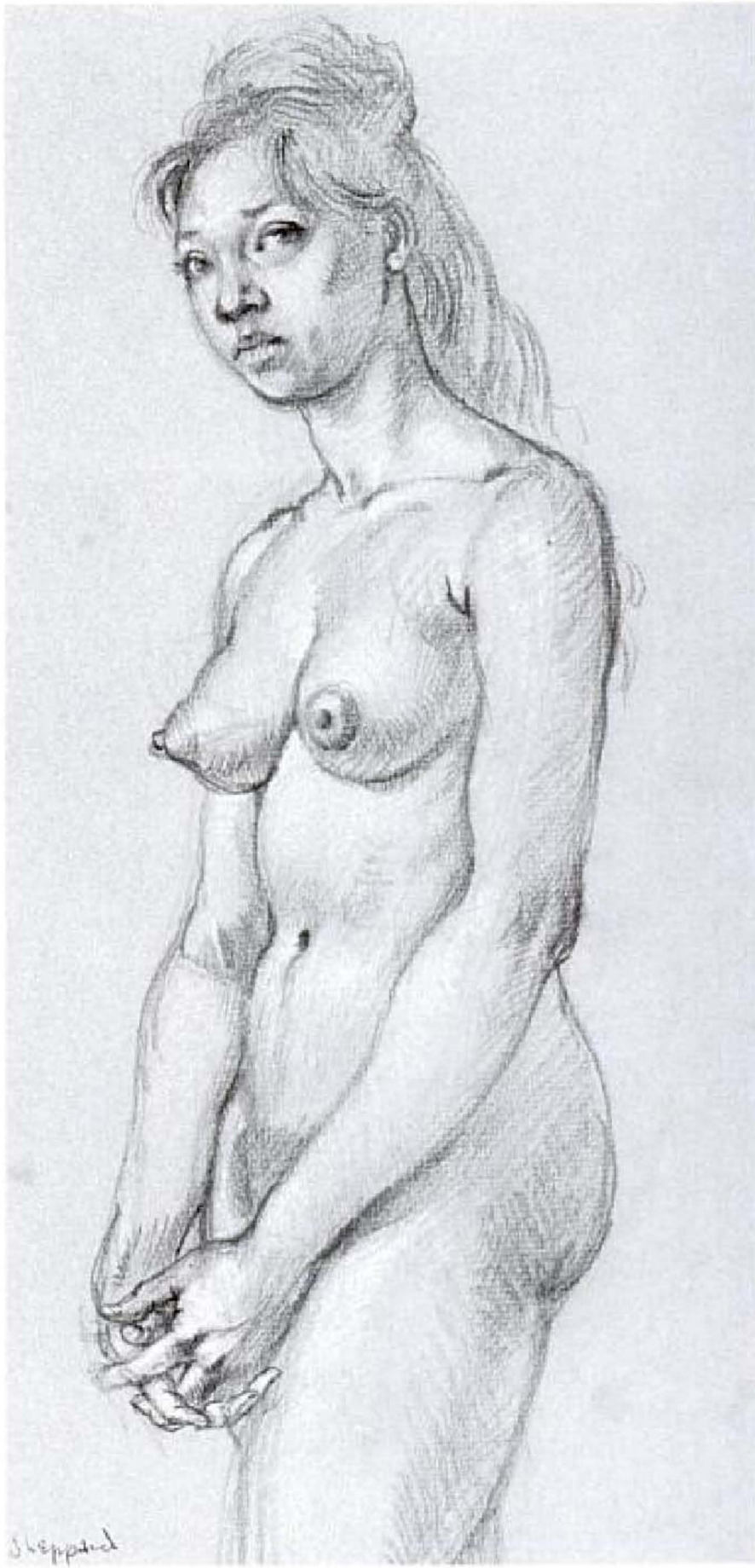
An S curve can be traced through the curve of the spine and down the right leg. The columns of muscle on either side of the lower spine are visible. The left shoulder dips down to counter the upward thrust of the right hip.

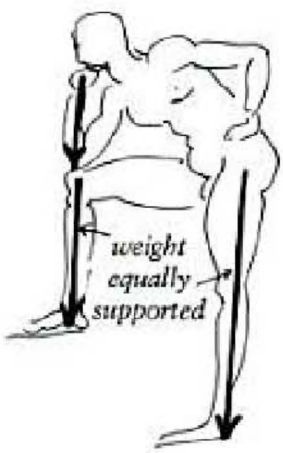


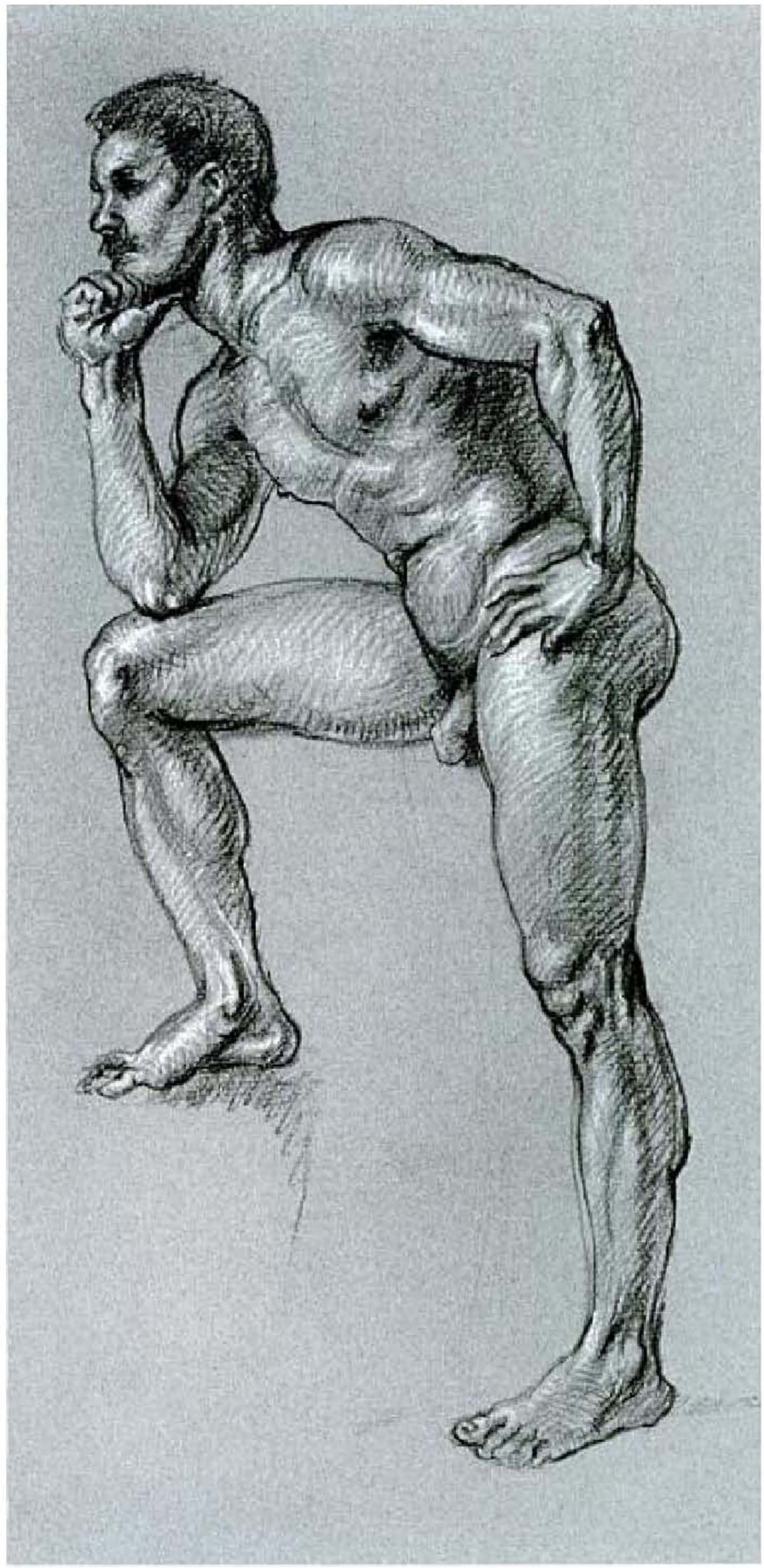
Right: *The wrist forms a flat plane between the bones of the forearm and the hand. The silhouettes of the upper arm and forearm form opposite angles (see diagram above).*



Above: *The arm begins with the shoulder blade. The outside of the forearm connects above the elbow. The left leg angles in under the torso to help support the weight of the body.*







Two large muscles form the inside of the calf. The arch on the inside of the foot is evident. Body weight is evenly distributed between the left leg and the continuing line between the right forearm and right lower leg (see diagram).

THE SEATED FIGURE

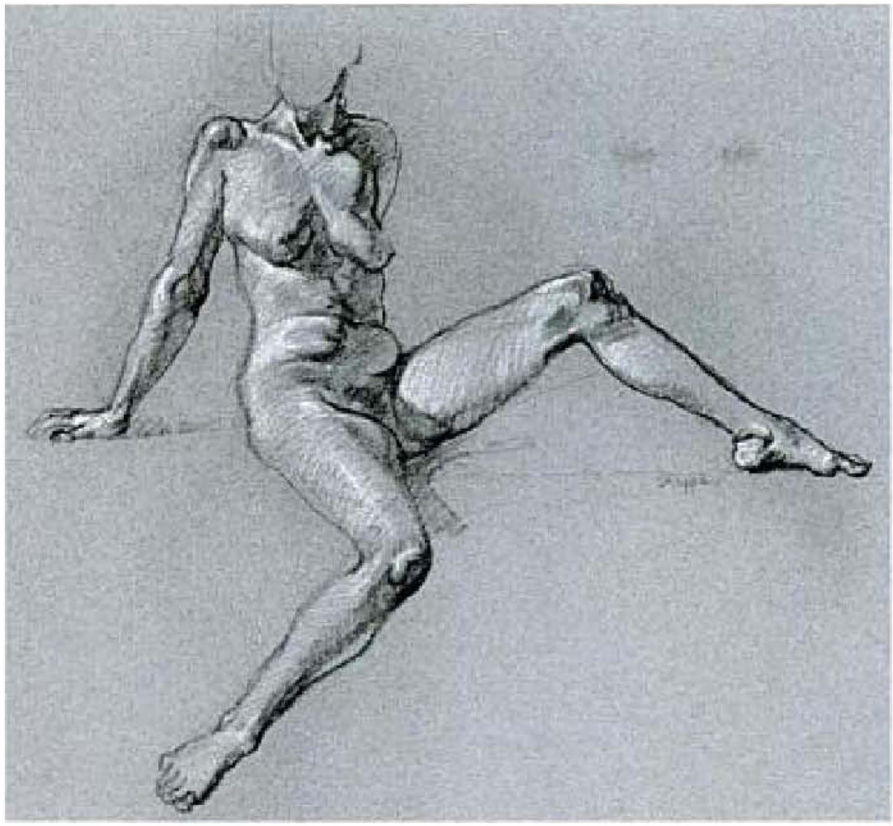
V

Most seated figures end up measuring six heads high: four for the torso and two for the part of the leg that is not foreshortened.

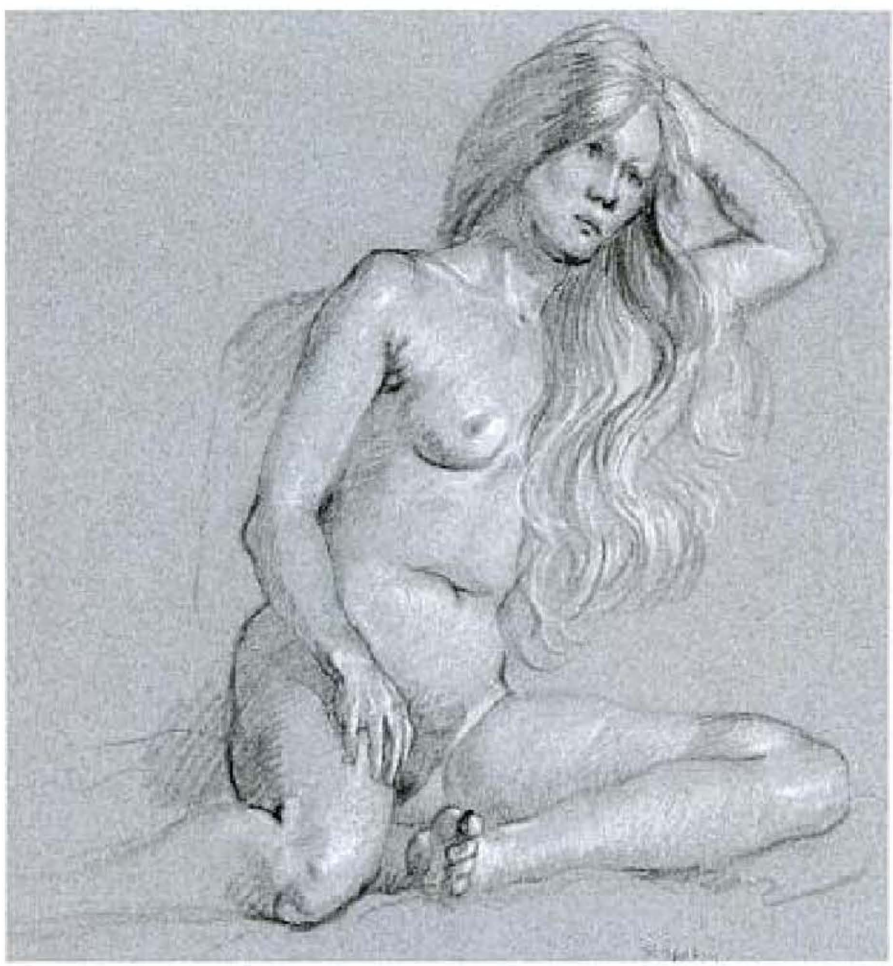
The weight of the figure usually rests on the buttocks and thighs, flattening them out.



The kneecap is very well explained in this drawing, as is the V-shaped bone beneath it. The shoulders are pushed upward by the arms supporting the heavy torso.



Locked arms support the leaning torso and push the shoulders high and forward. The collarbones go behind the shoulders. Folds on the belly are caused by the raised leg.



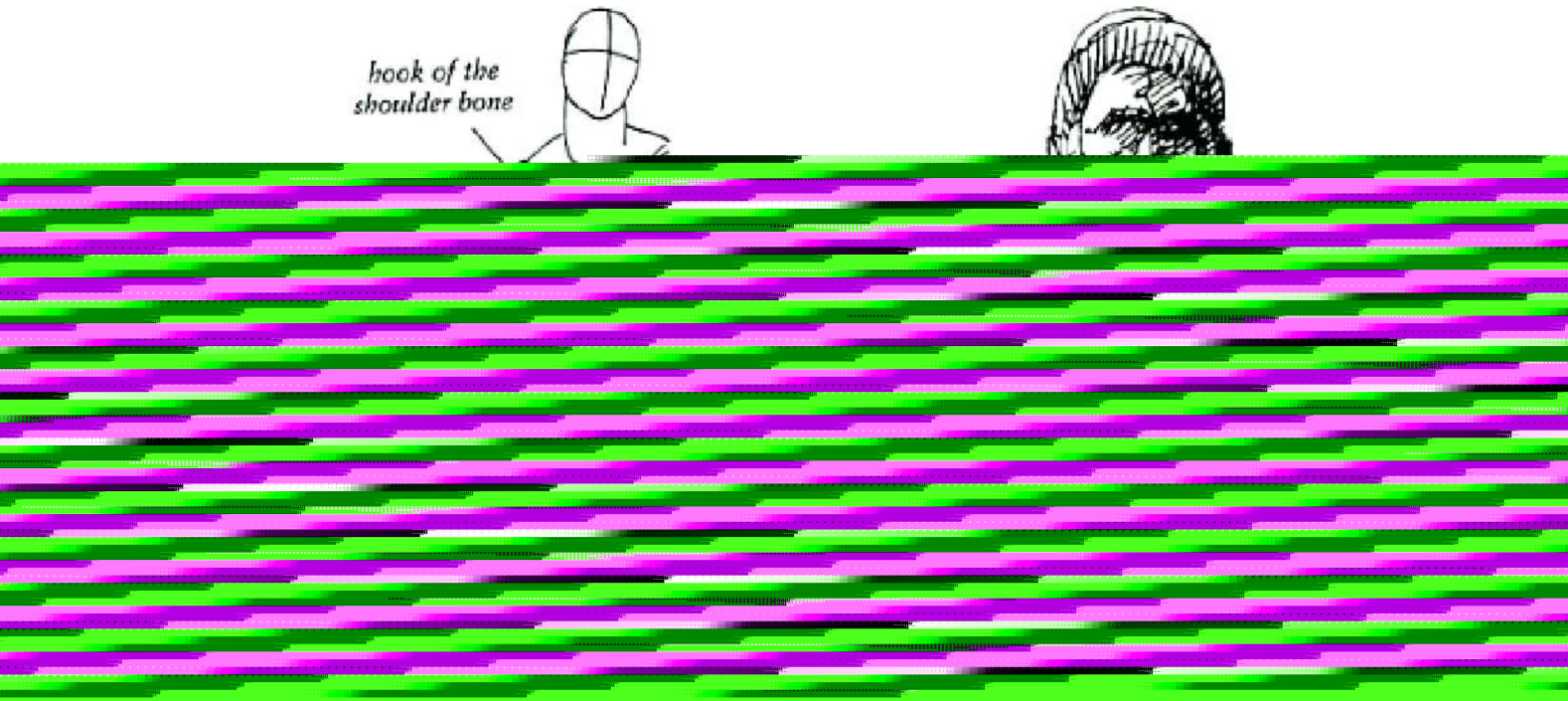
The softness of the thighs and belly is typically female. The bones are less evident than in the male, except in the knees, wrists and elbows.

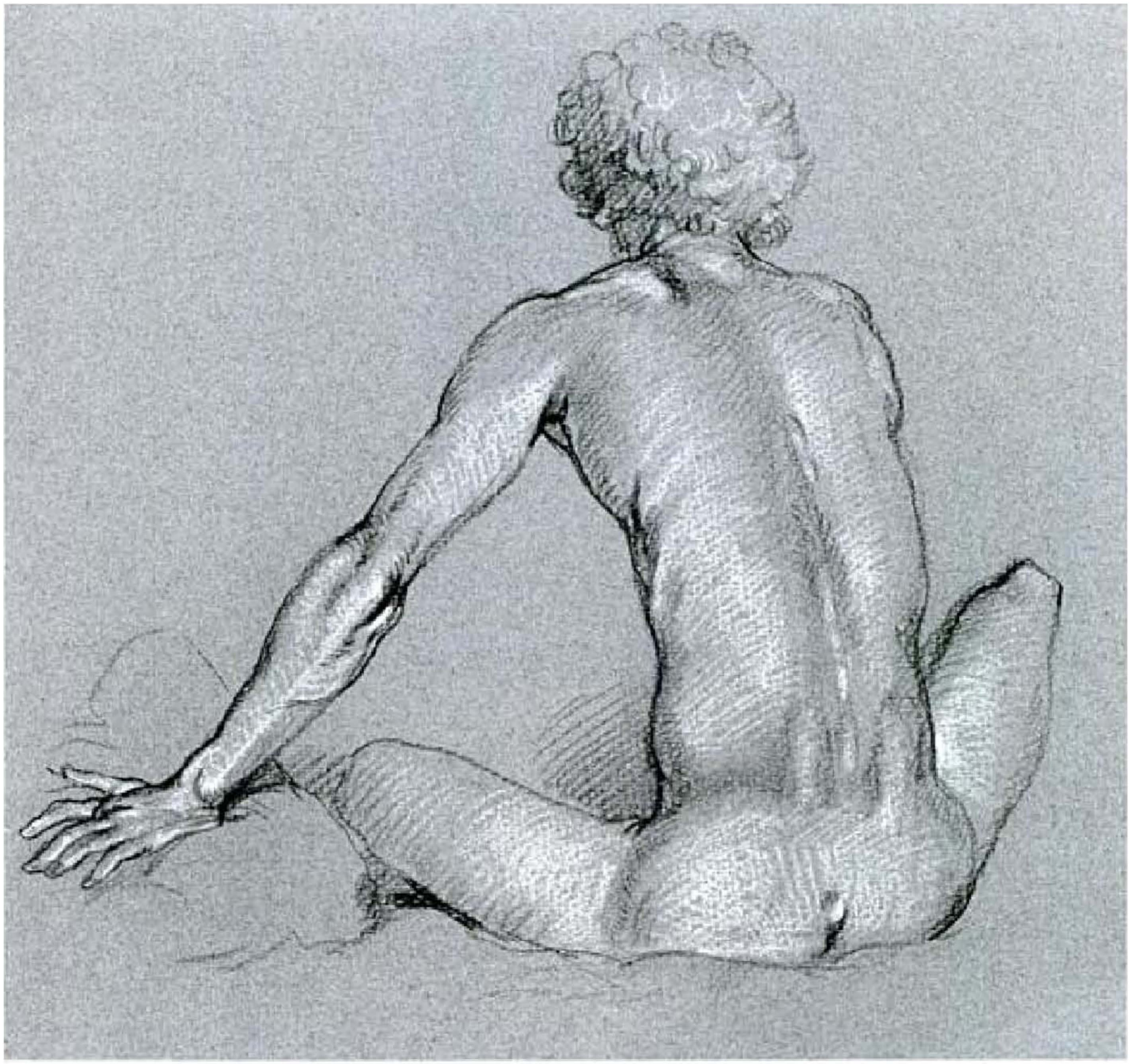


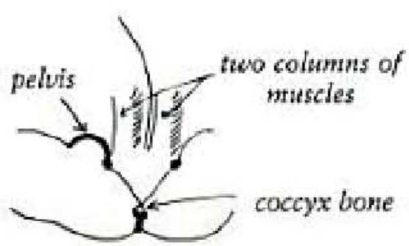
The thighs forced together bulge out of their normal shape. The hips are full and high.



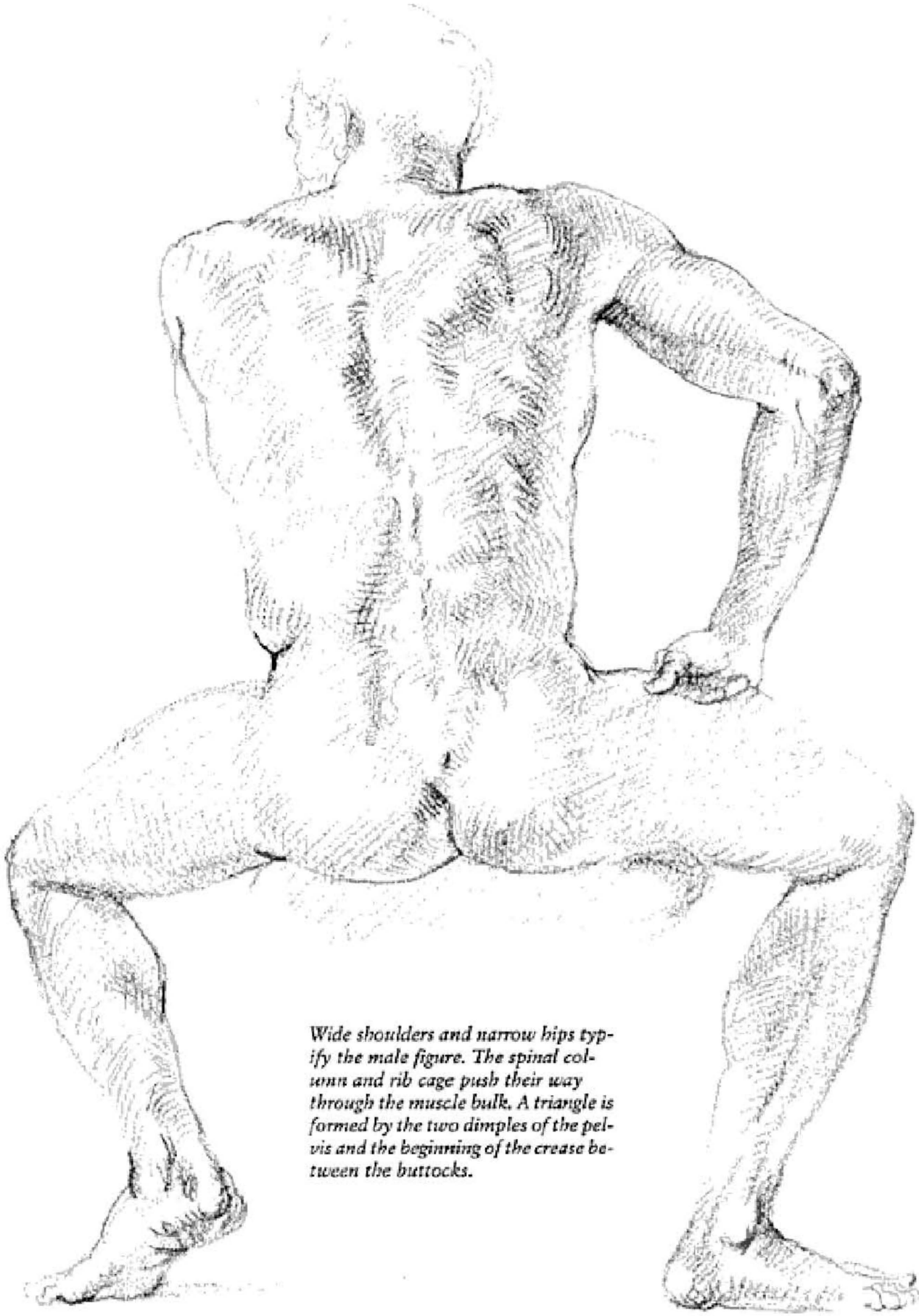
This is a watercolor wash and chalk on white paper. Here color must be worked around the highlights, leaving the white of the paper to do the job. The foreshortened legs are defined by overlapping contour lines.


hook of the
shoulder bone





At the base of the spine, part of the pelvis called the coccyx (the beginning of the inverted human tail) protrudes. The spine pushes against the skin as the torso leans forward. Two vertical columns of muscles start at the end of the pelvis and extend up into the back along the spine (see diagram).

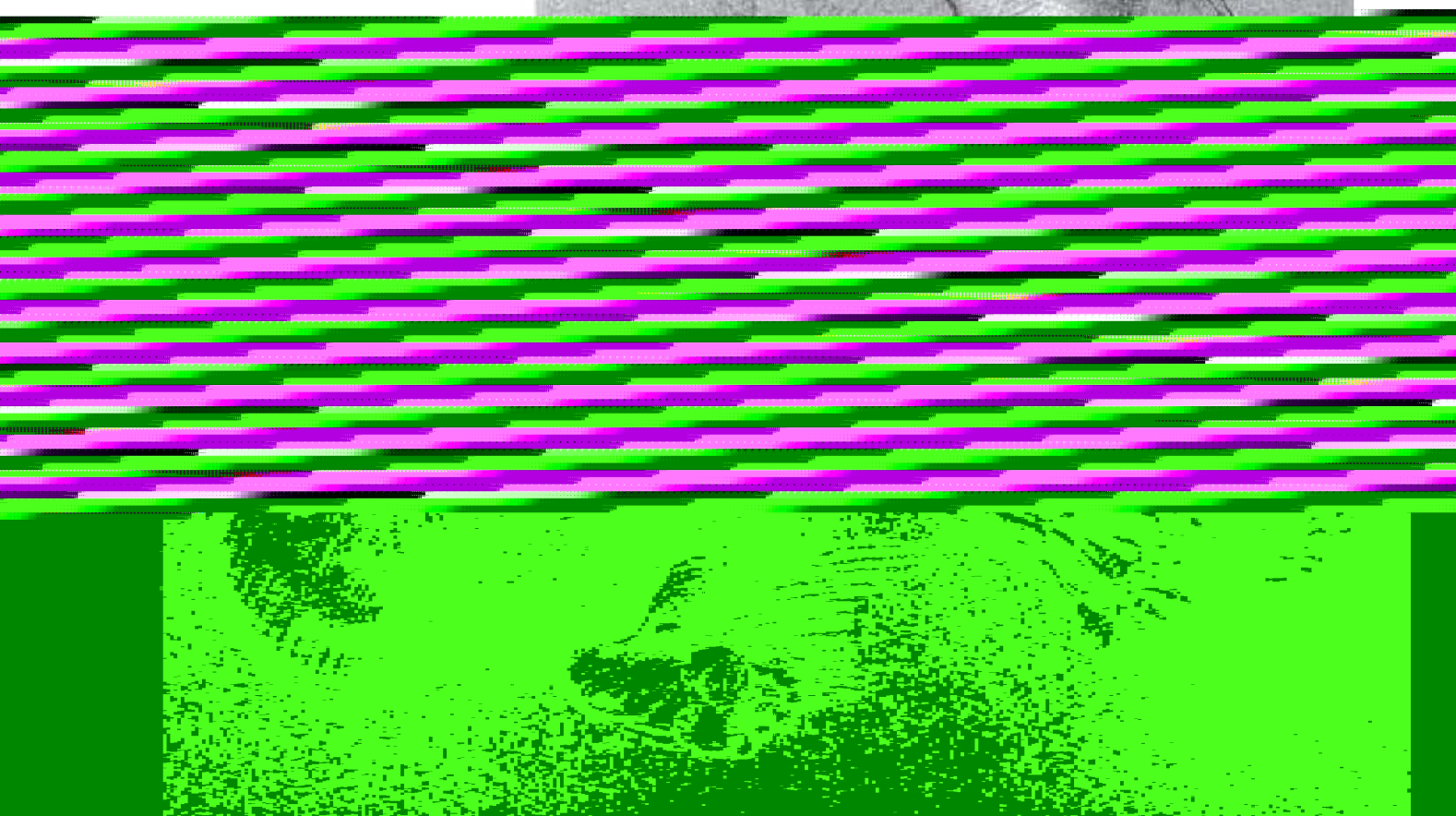


Wide shoulders and narrow hips typify the male figure. The spinal column and rib cage push their way through the muscle bulk. A triangle is formed by the two dimples of the pelvis and the beginning of the crease between the buttocks.

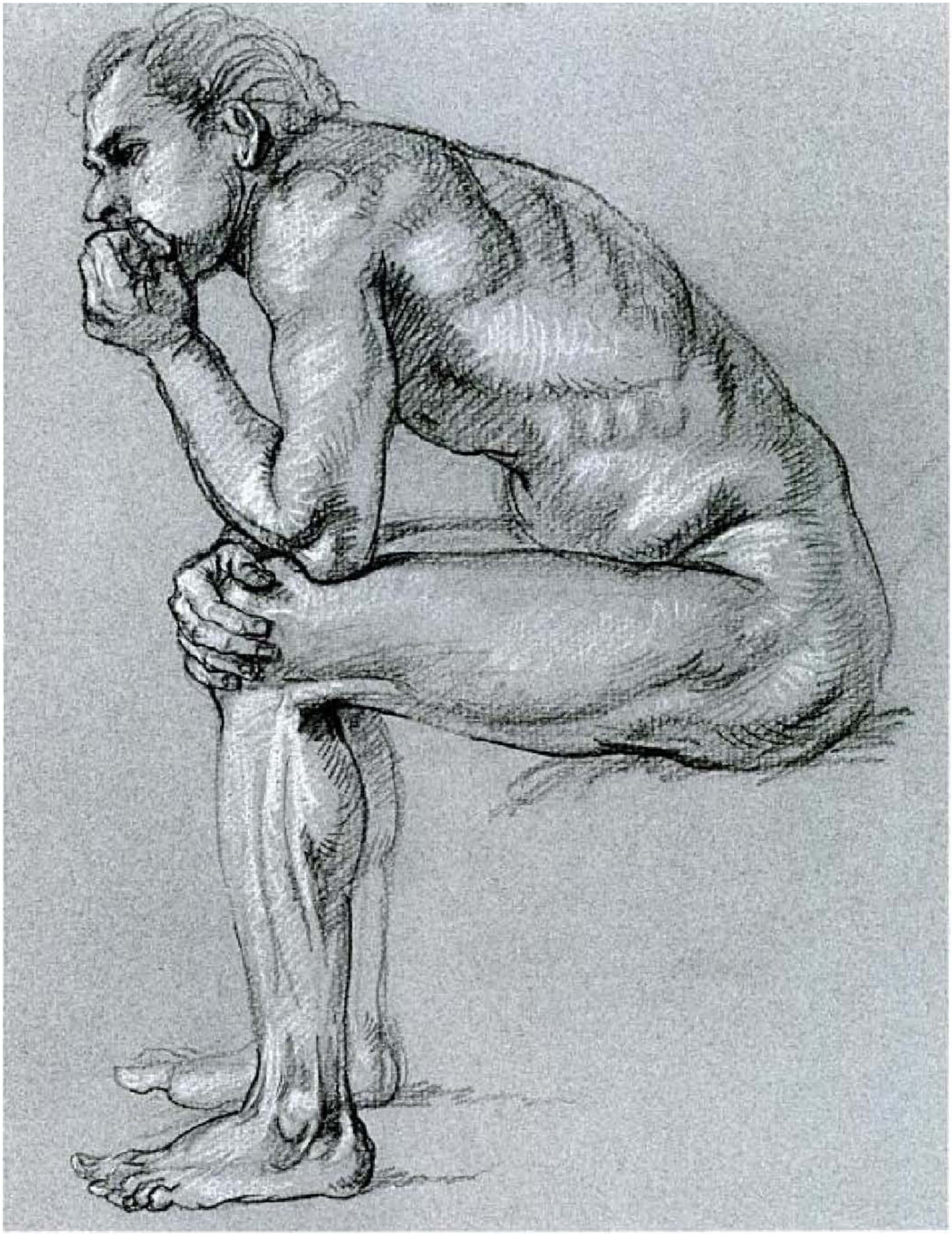


The vertebrae on the back of the neck and the bones of the shoulder are visible on the surface. The bent elbows make the bones create triangular shapes.





The muscles of the back extend out into the arm. The thumb, measured from the wrist, is longer than the little finger side of the hand. At the wrist, there is a short flat space between the two bones of the arm and the hand.

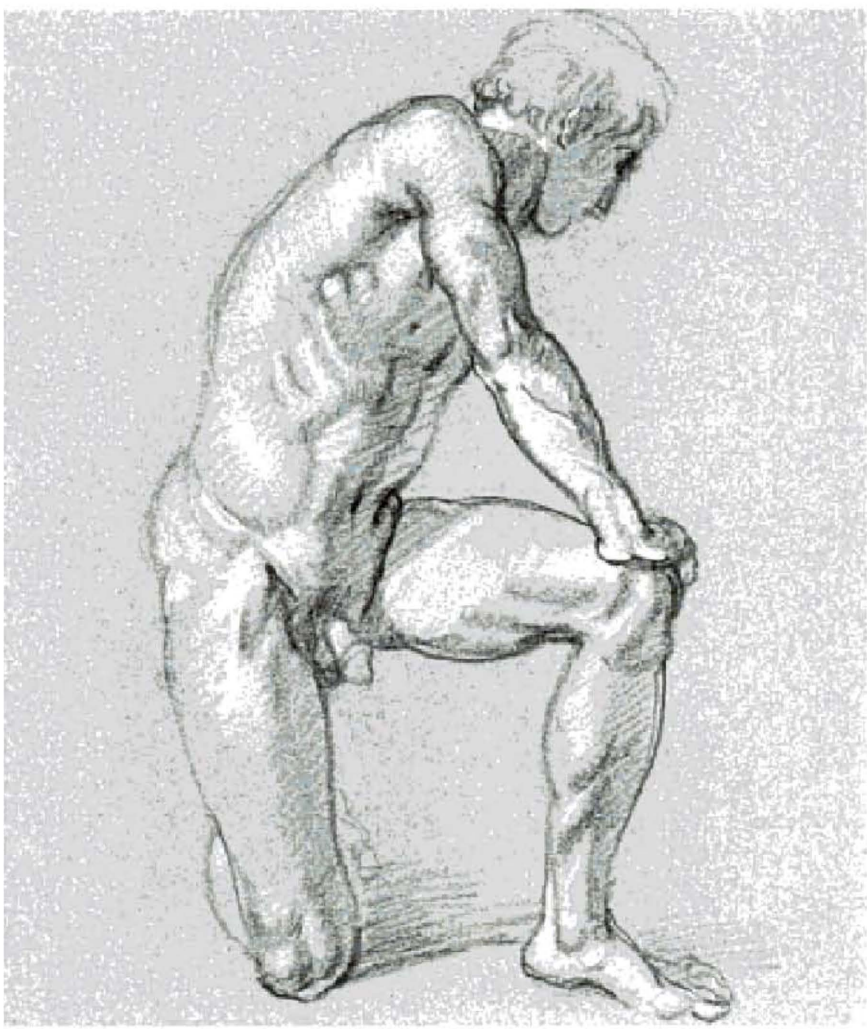


In contrast to the inside of the calf, the outside has several long, thin muscles that run down it to the foot. The belly hangs relaxed as the torso leans forward.

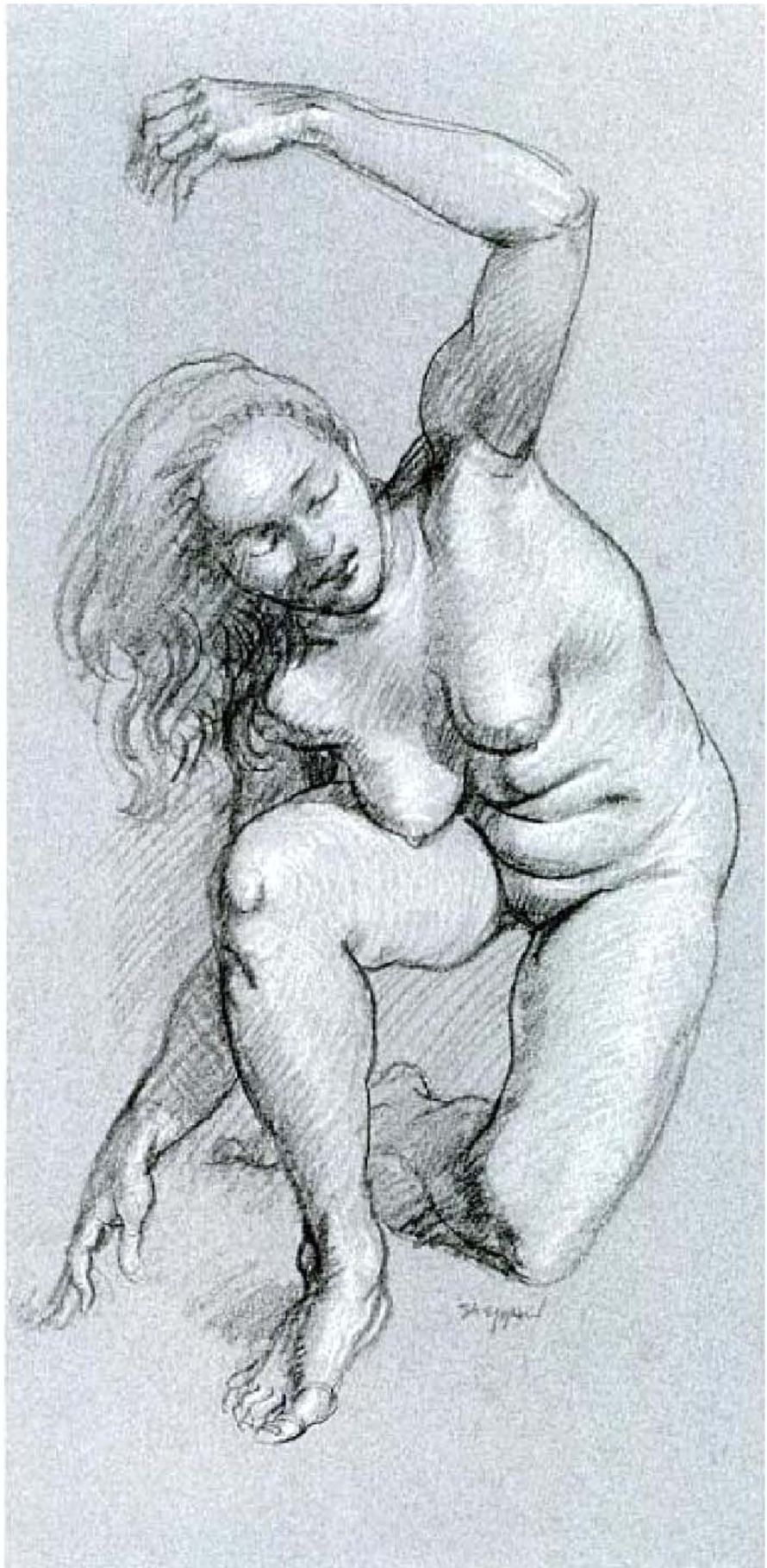
The Kneeling Figure

VI

The weight of a kneeling figure is on one or both knees, and sometimes the elbows or hands. A kneeling figure is six heads tall, with the lower part of one leg prone to the supporting surface. Usually this leg is foreshortened. Kneeling figures can be very dramatic and expressive, and are well worth study.



The full muscle above the pelvic crest is called the external oblique. The serratus muscles attach to the downward slanting ribs and can be seen beneath the armpit. The bone on the inside of the elbow is always prominent.

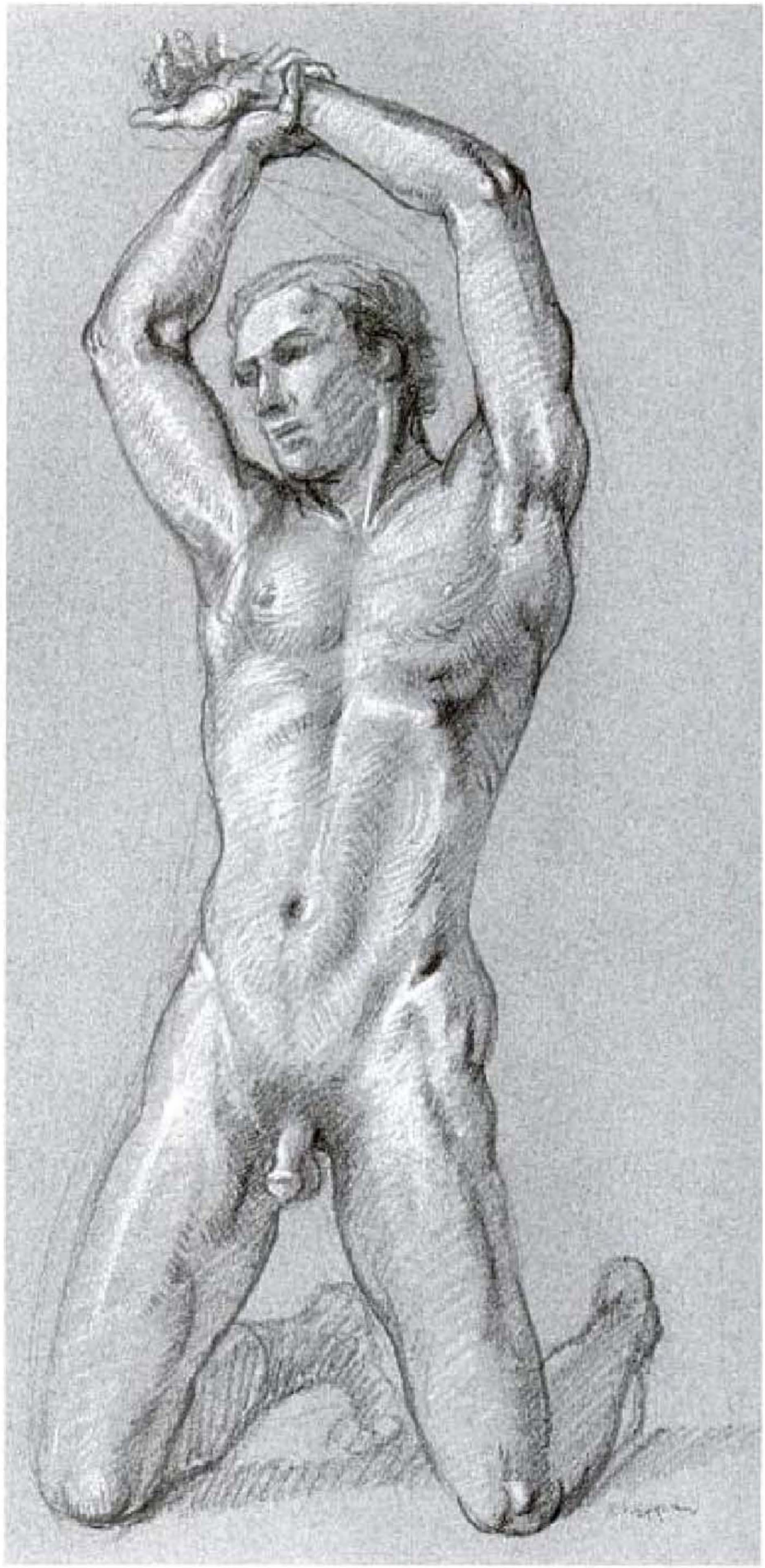


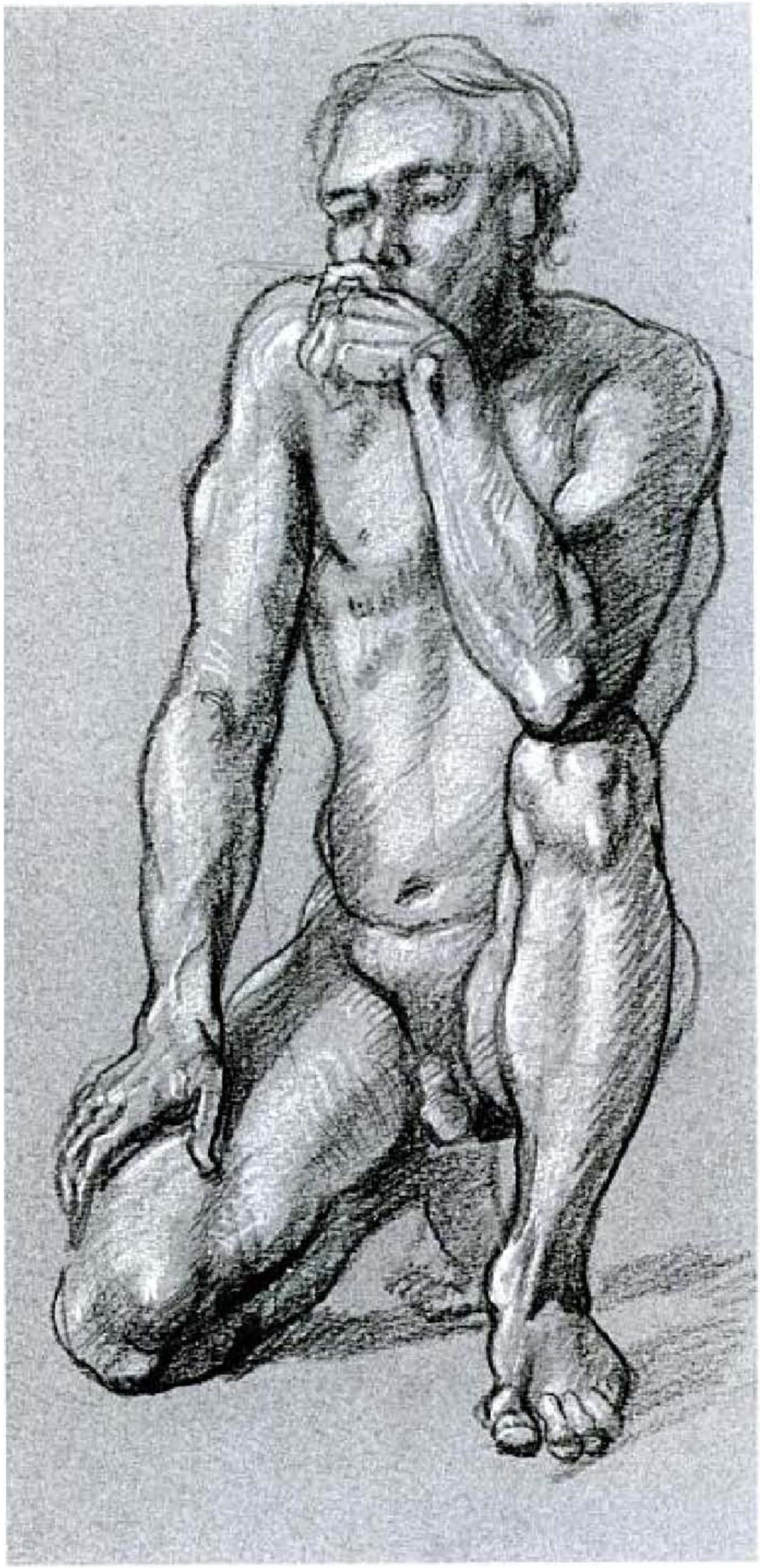
The weight is supported on the left knee and the right fingertips. The right arm is used as a balance. The cast shadow thrown from the right knee projects the knee forward.

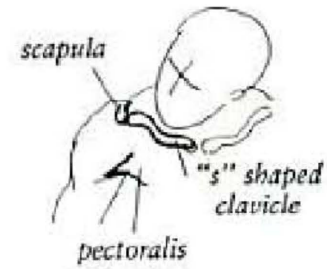


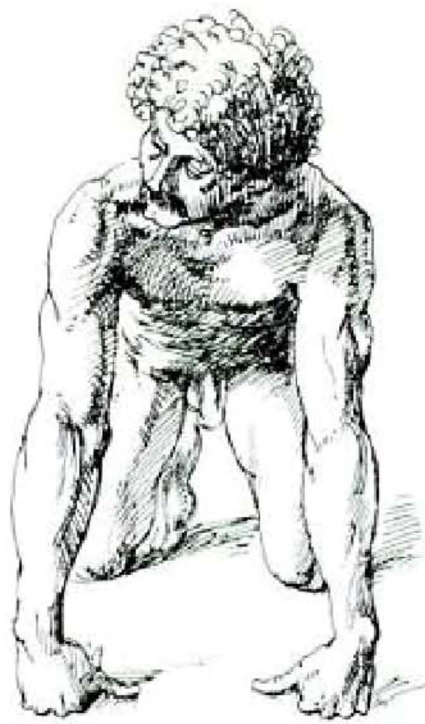
Above: *The muscles on the outside of the elbow start high up in the upper arm and cross over and down toward the thumb side of the wrist. The neck cylinder fits down between the back shoulder muscles and the two collarbones in front (see diagram).*

The chest muscle or pectoralis pulls up into the arm and creates the front wall of the armpit. Next to the pectoralis, just above the armpit, is a small muscle called the coracobrachialis that only shows when the arm is raised. The large muscle from the base of the neck to the back of the ear is the sternomastoid.









Above: *The clavicles or collarbones angle back from the front of the base of the neck in an S shape and meet the end of the scapulas (see diagram above). The pectoralis or chest muscles extend out into the arms.*



The kneecap and its ligament are shaped like a lollipop on a stick. The edge of the large bone of the lower part of the leg descends downward to the inside ankle (see diagram).



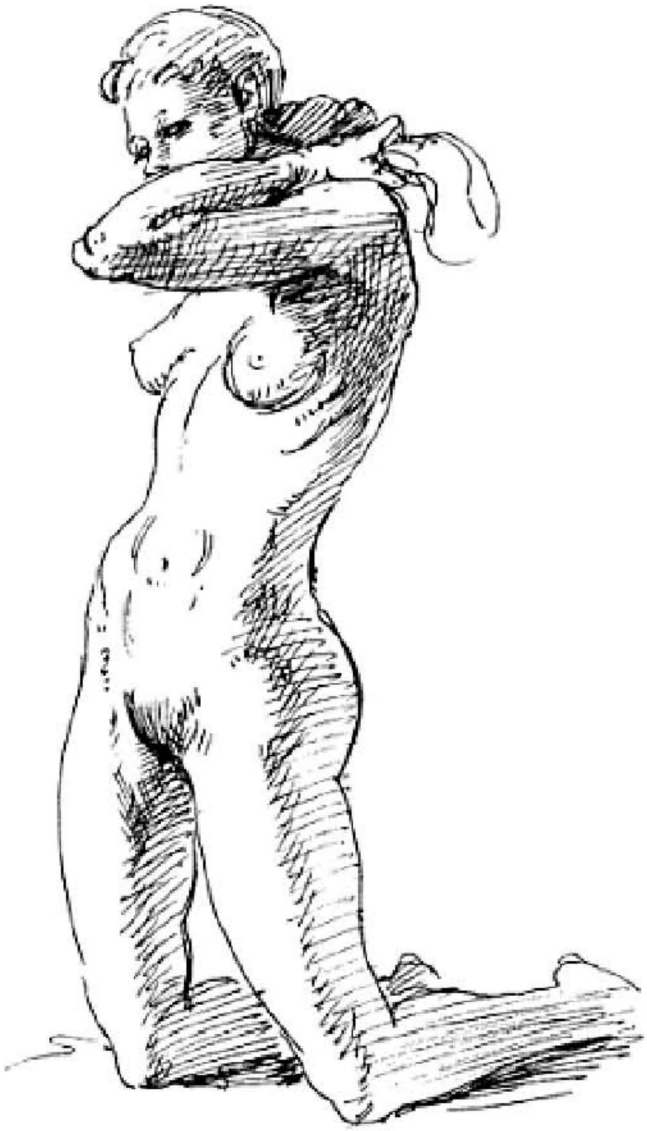
An unseen arm balances the figure. Some of the best poses are difficult to hold, so an artist must get the information down quickly.



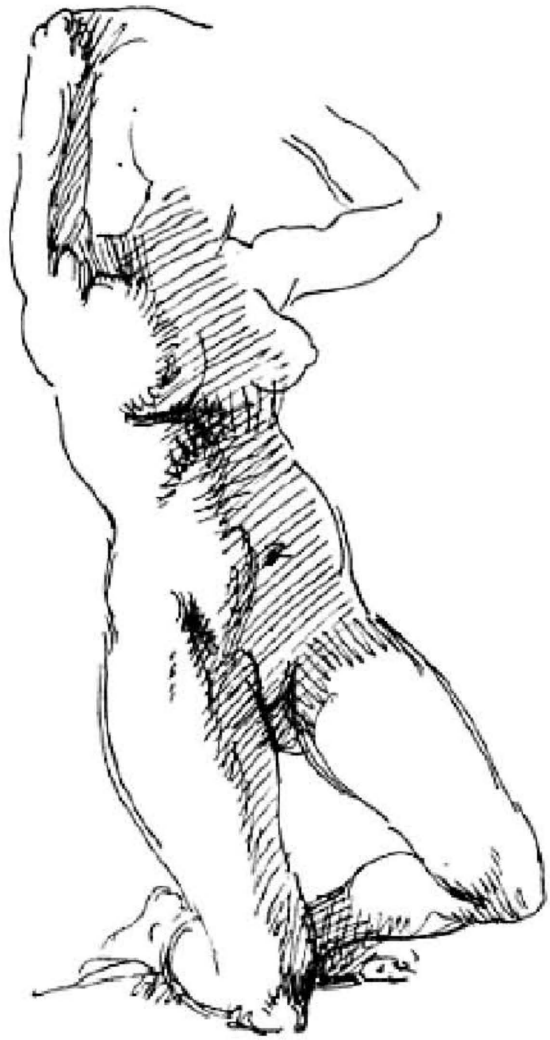
Even though the shadows are just scribbled in, they still indicate the volume of the figure and the angle of the light source.



The arch is prominent on the inside of the foot. The shadow accents follow the direction of the form.



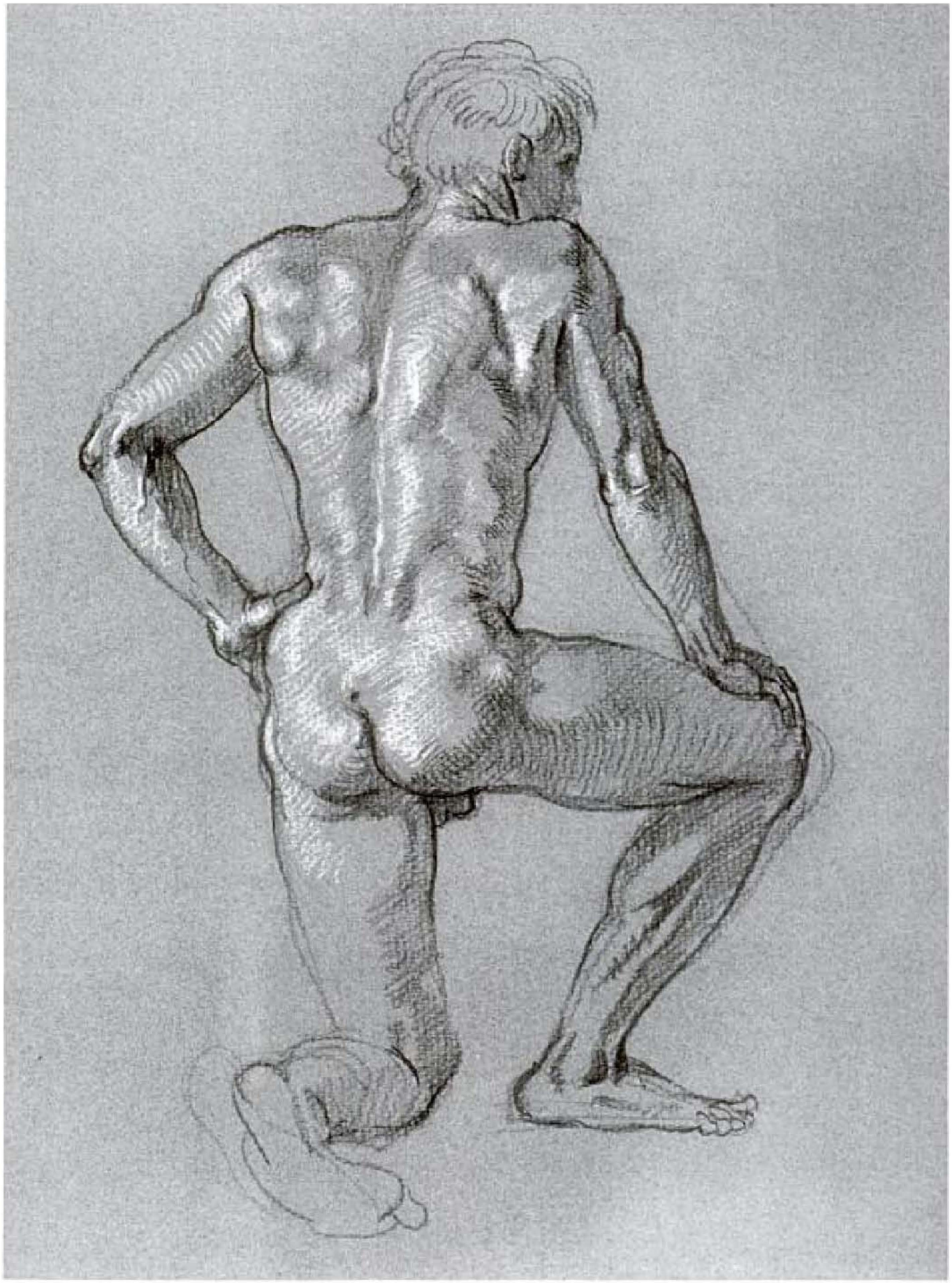
The head and belly are forward to balance the arched back. Bones are obvious in the elbow, ribs, pelvis and knees.



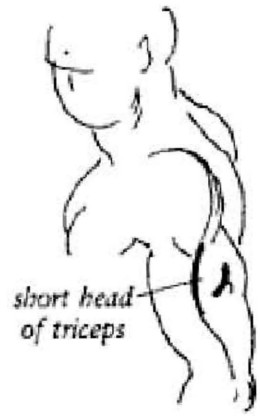
The model is balanced on one knee and one foot. A pose like this must be drawn quickly. The shadow accent indicates the arch of the rib cage and the ridge of the pelvis.

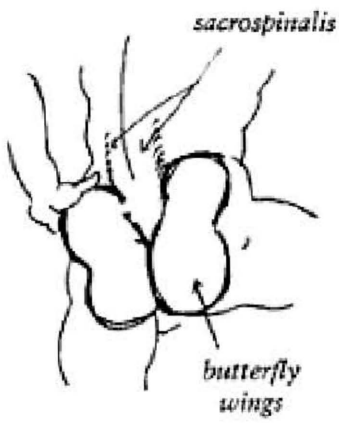


The weight of the figure is thrown forward onto the left arm. In this two-minute sketch, the light and shadow have been roughly indicated.



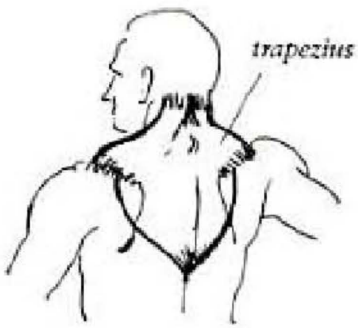
Right: *As the torso twists on the pelvis and the head twists on the neck, folds are formed by the skin. The short head of the triceps is prominent on the upper part of the arm (see diagram at right).*

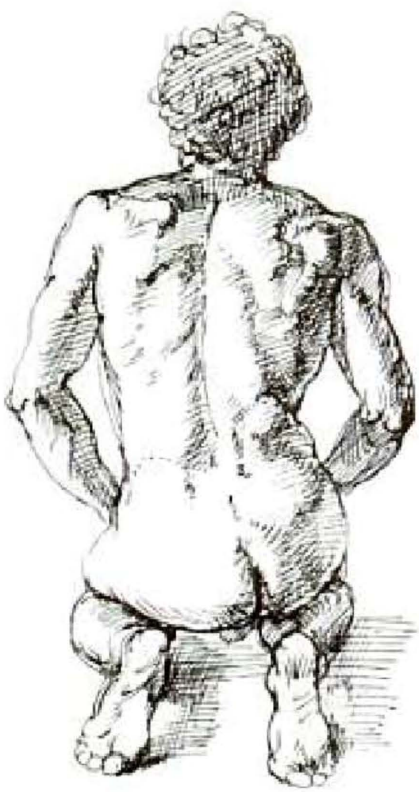




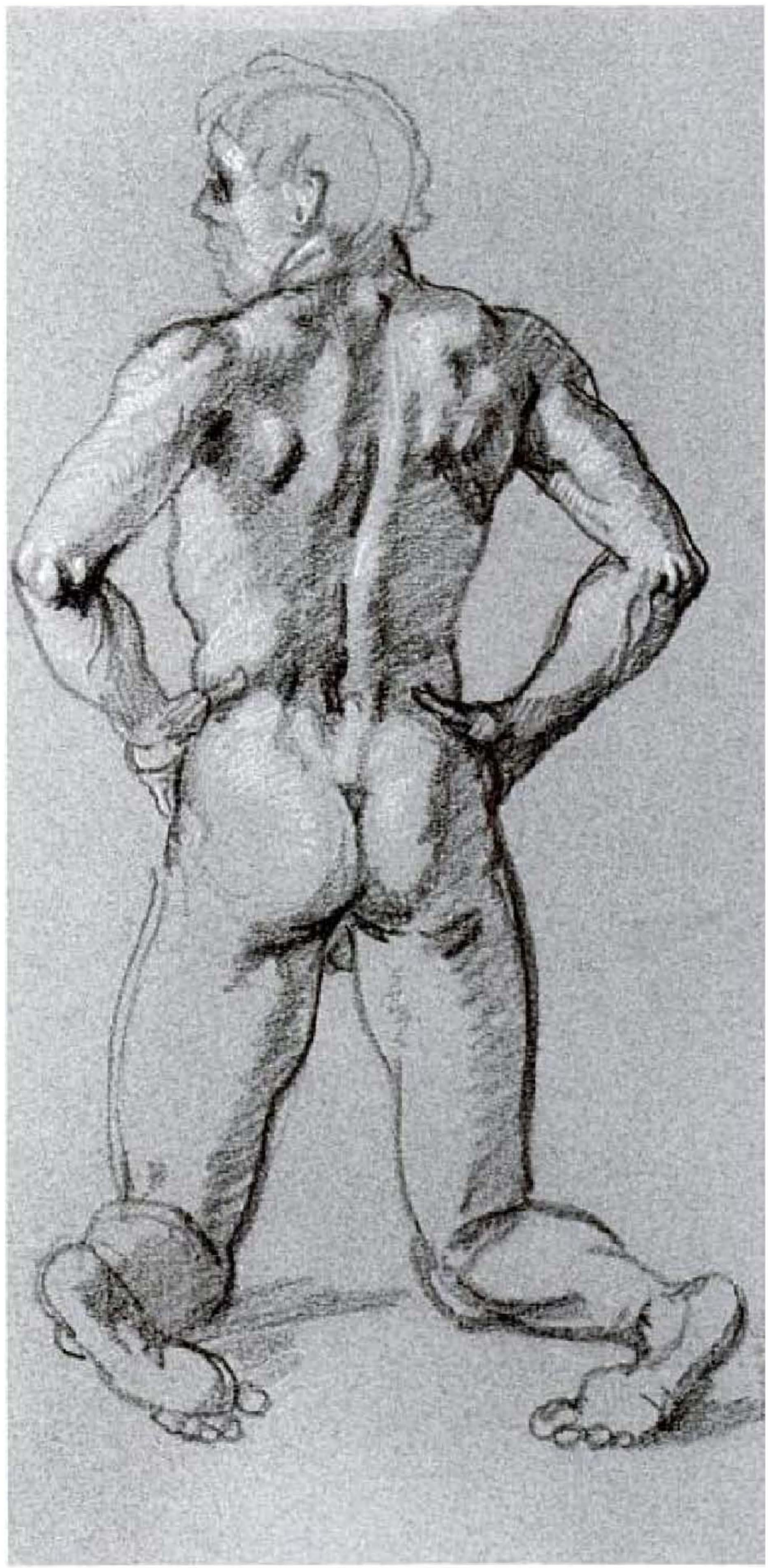
Left: *The inside bones of the elbows are obvious and protrude. Two cylindrical-shaped muscles, called the sacrospinalis, rise out of the pelvic region and disappear up into the back. The pelvic muscles in the back, called the gluteus maximus, form a butterfly shape (see diagram above).*

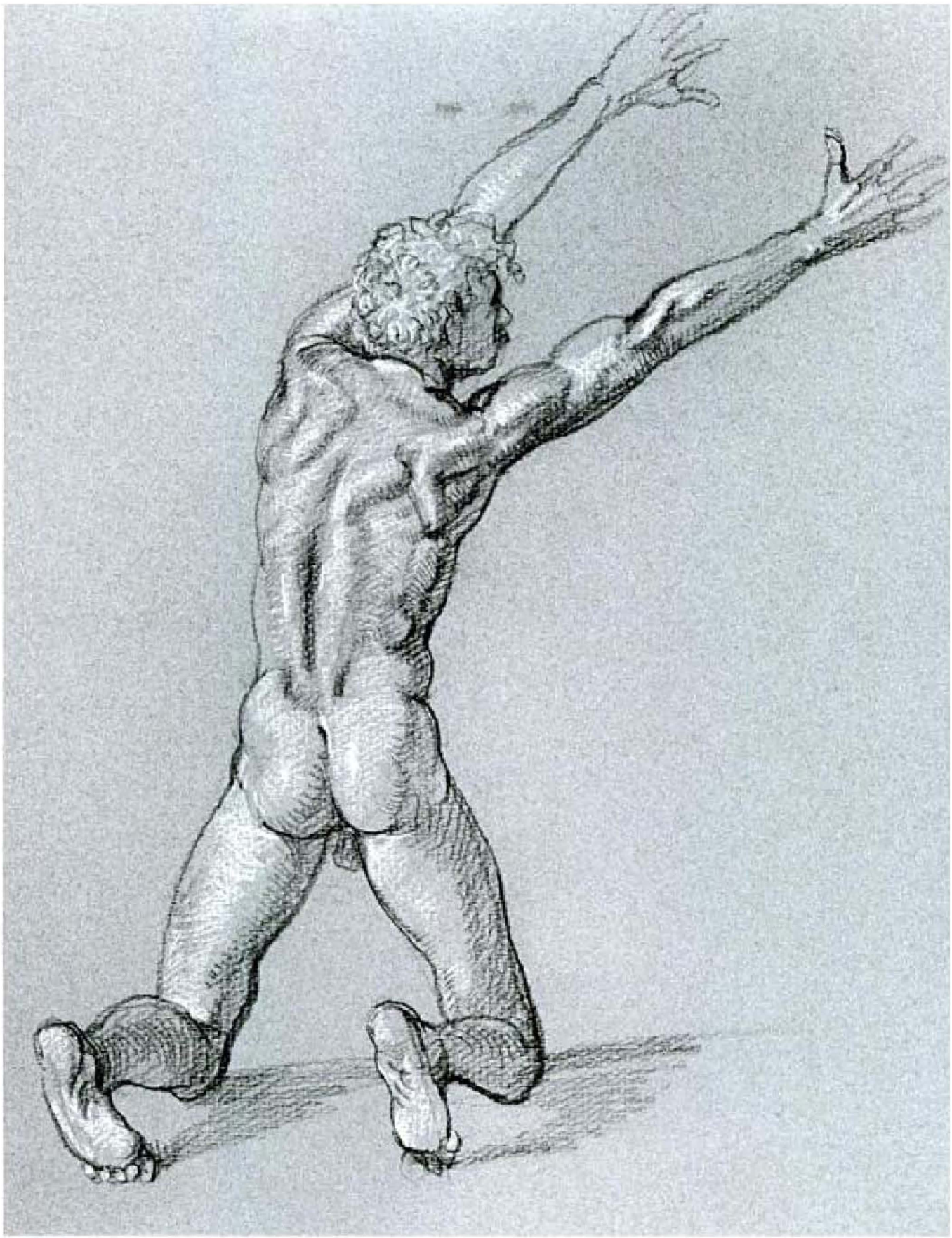
The large muscle that forms the back of the shoulders is called the trapezius. It starts at the base of the skull and descends out to the tip of the shoulder blades, forming the silhouette of the shoulders (see diagram).



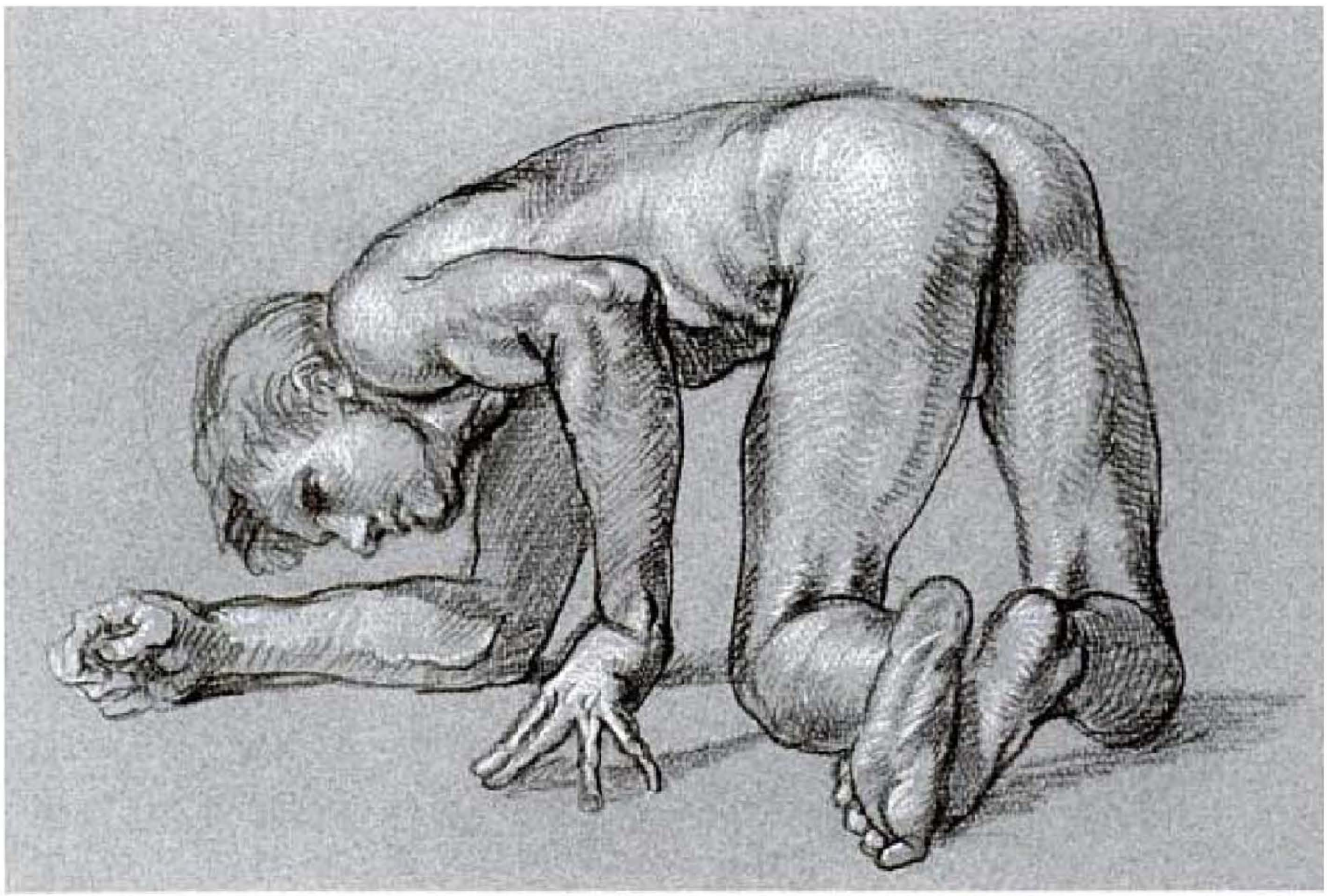


The two shoulder blades are clearly marked, as are the two dimples from the pelvis. The shoulders and pelvis are at opposite angles.

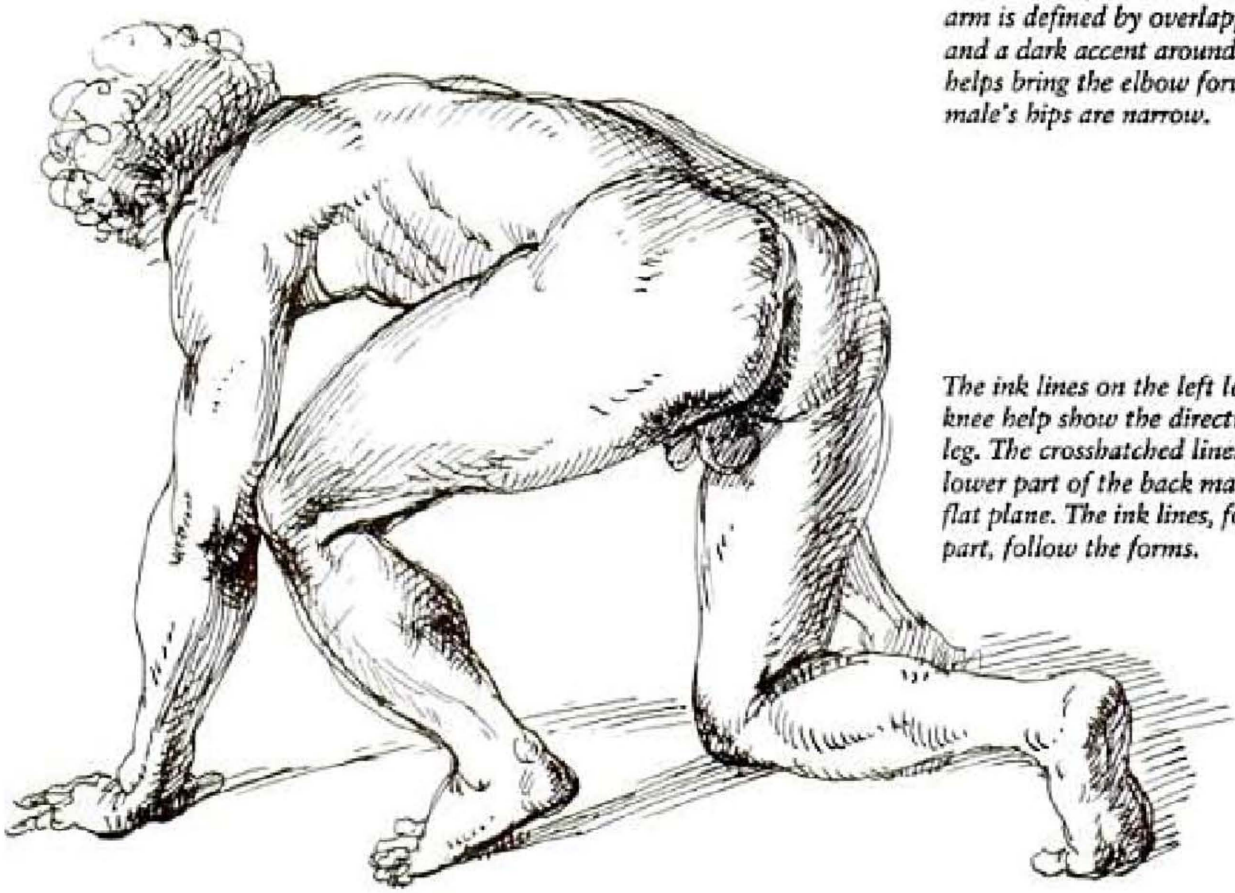




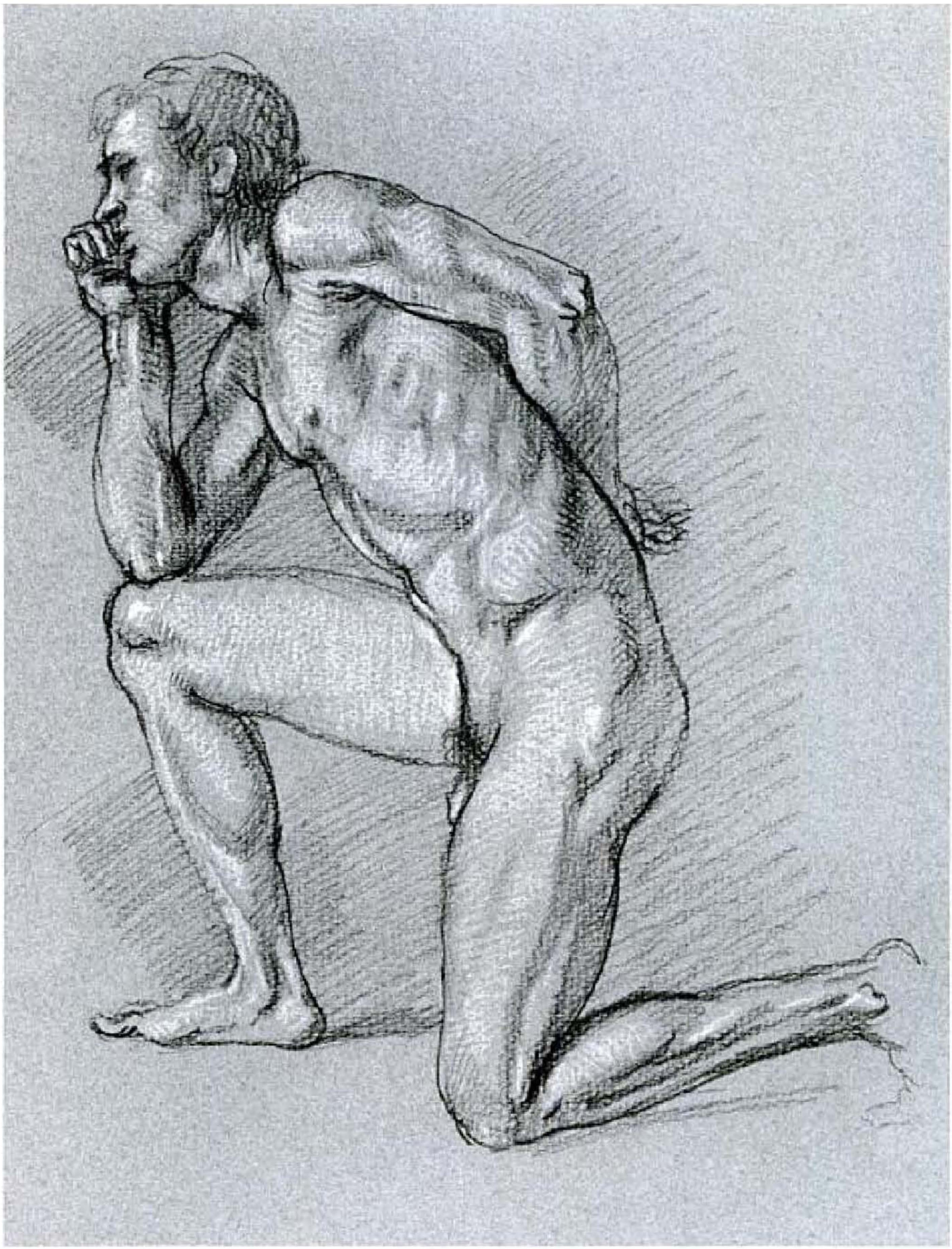
When the arms are raised, the bottom of the shoulder blades follow. The muscles from the shoulder blades attach out into the arms. They help to pull the arm back into place and rotate it.



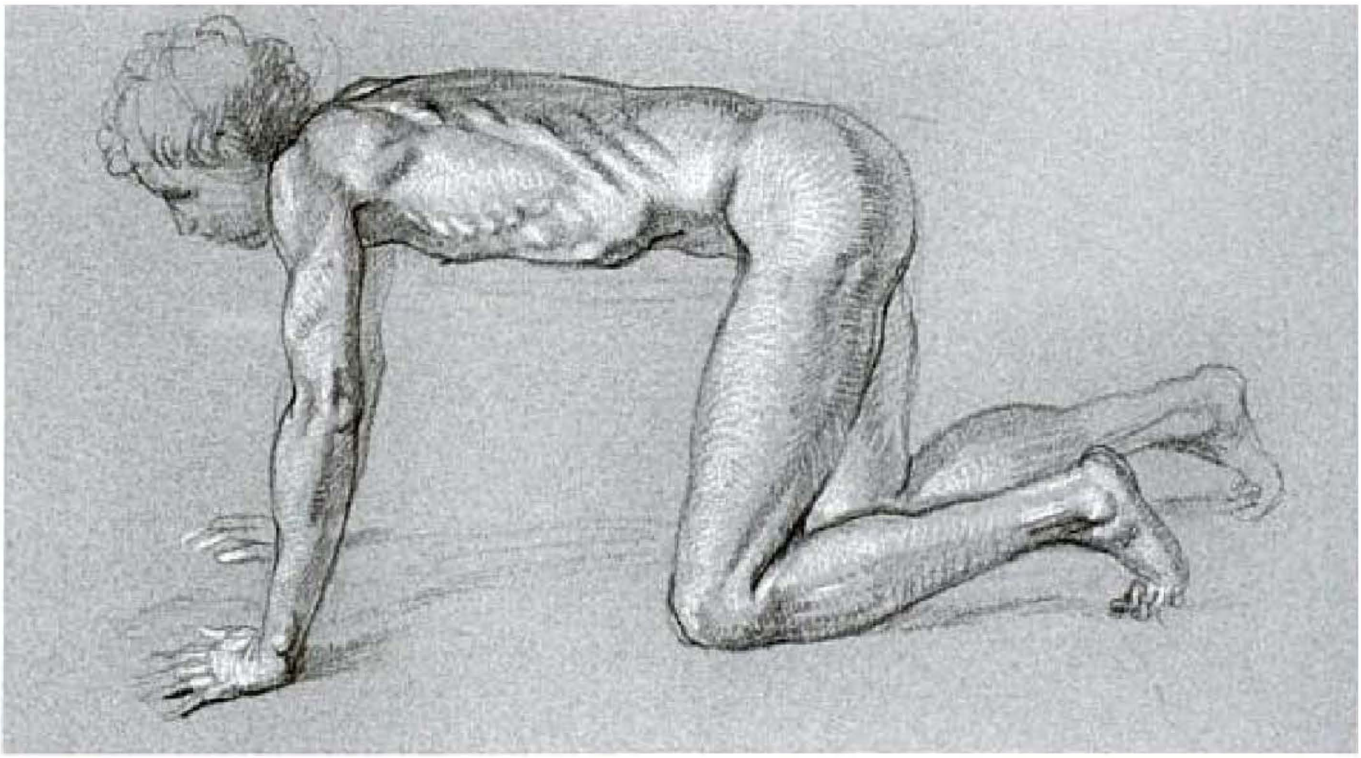
Above: *The foreshortened upper left arm is defined by overlapping lines, and a dark accent around the elbow helps bring the elbow forward. The male's hips are narrow.*



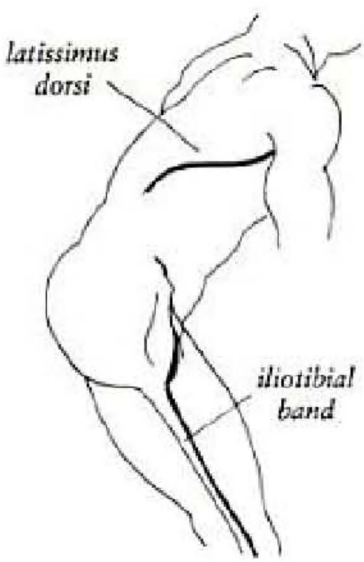
The ink lines on the left leg near the knee help show the direction of the leg. The crosshatched lines on the lower part of the back make it into a flat plane. The ink lines, for the most part, follow the forms.



The division down the center of the body can be seen. The hipbone projects out from the pelvis and is the fourth head measurement. The two large muscles on the inside of the calf are clearly defined.



Above: *The serratus muscles appear from beneath the latissimus dorsi muscle (see diagram) and attach to the ribs. The two floating ribs can be seen at the bottom of the rib cage.*



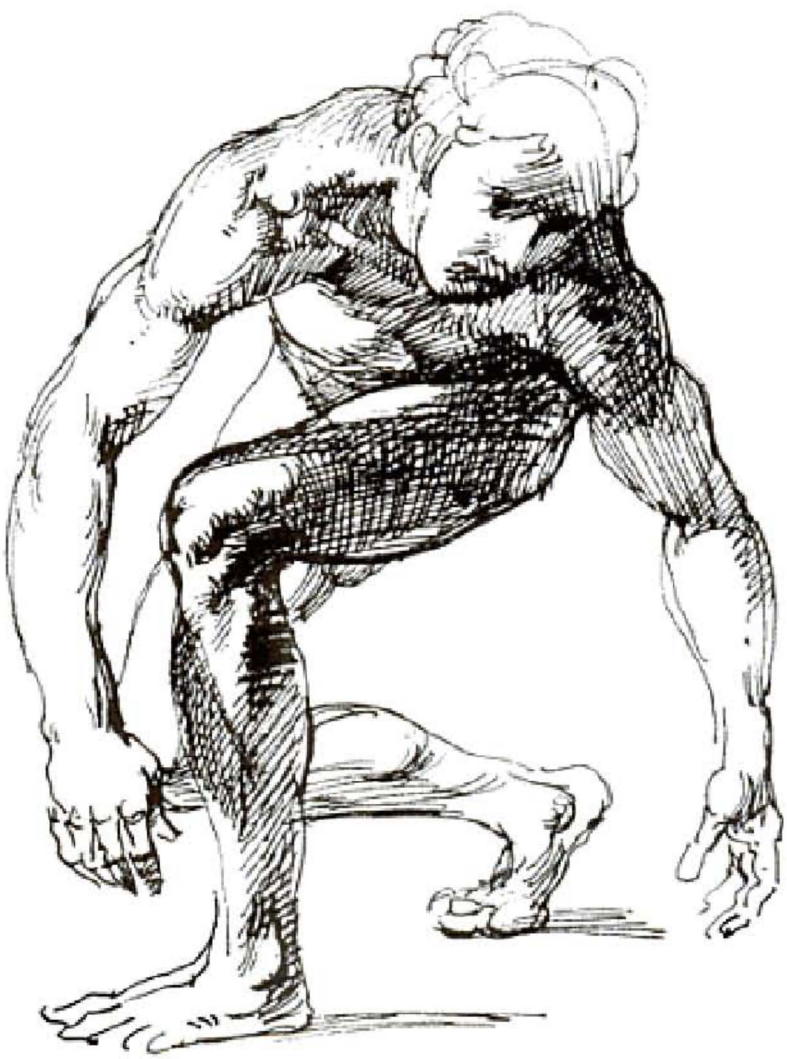
A large muscle, called the latissimus dorsi, rises from the spine and pelvis and extends out into the arm, forming the back wall of the armpit (see diagram). A band (the iliotibial band) runs down the outside of the leg from the gluteus muscles in the buttocks to the head of the large bone below the knee.



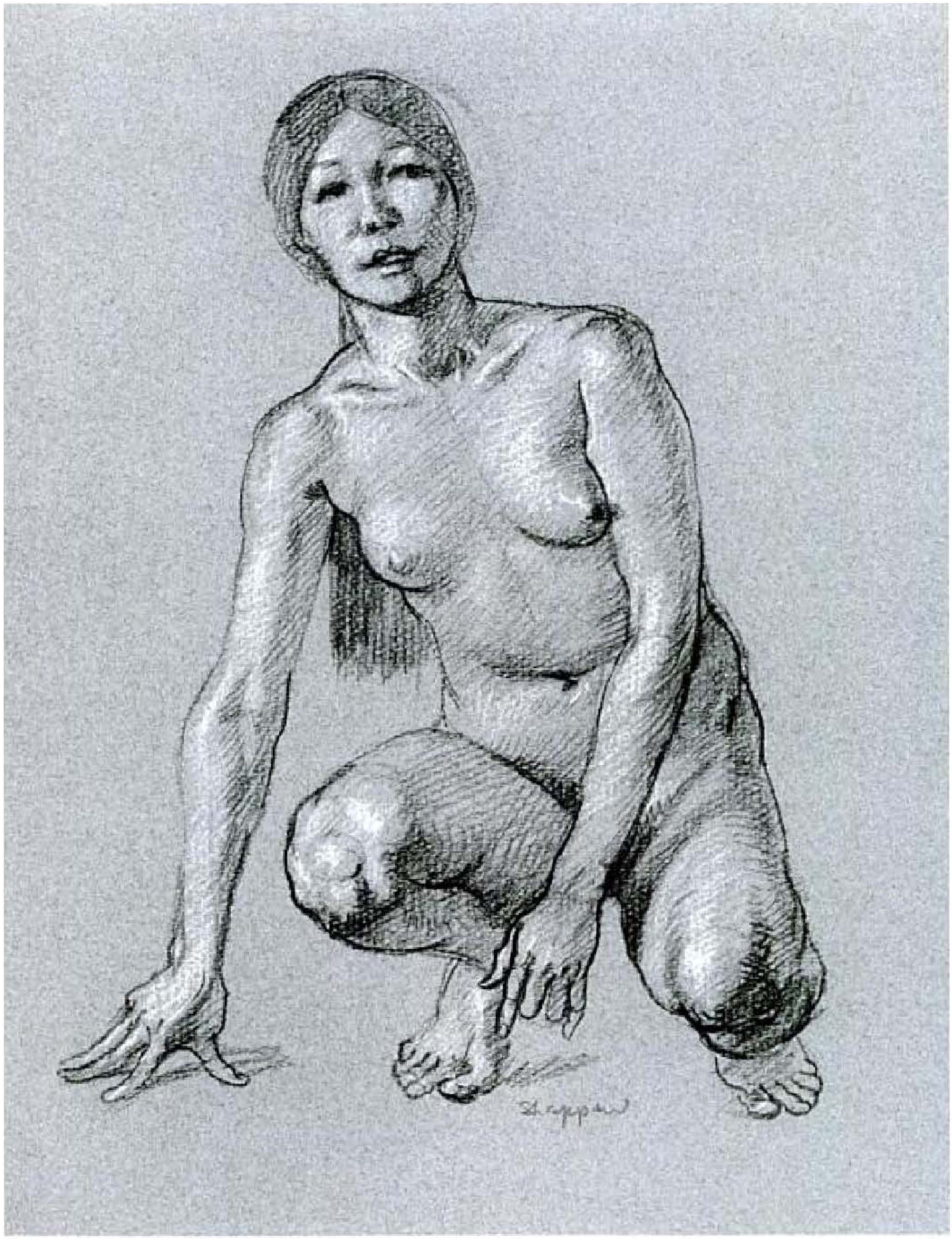
THE CROUCHING FIGURE

VII

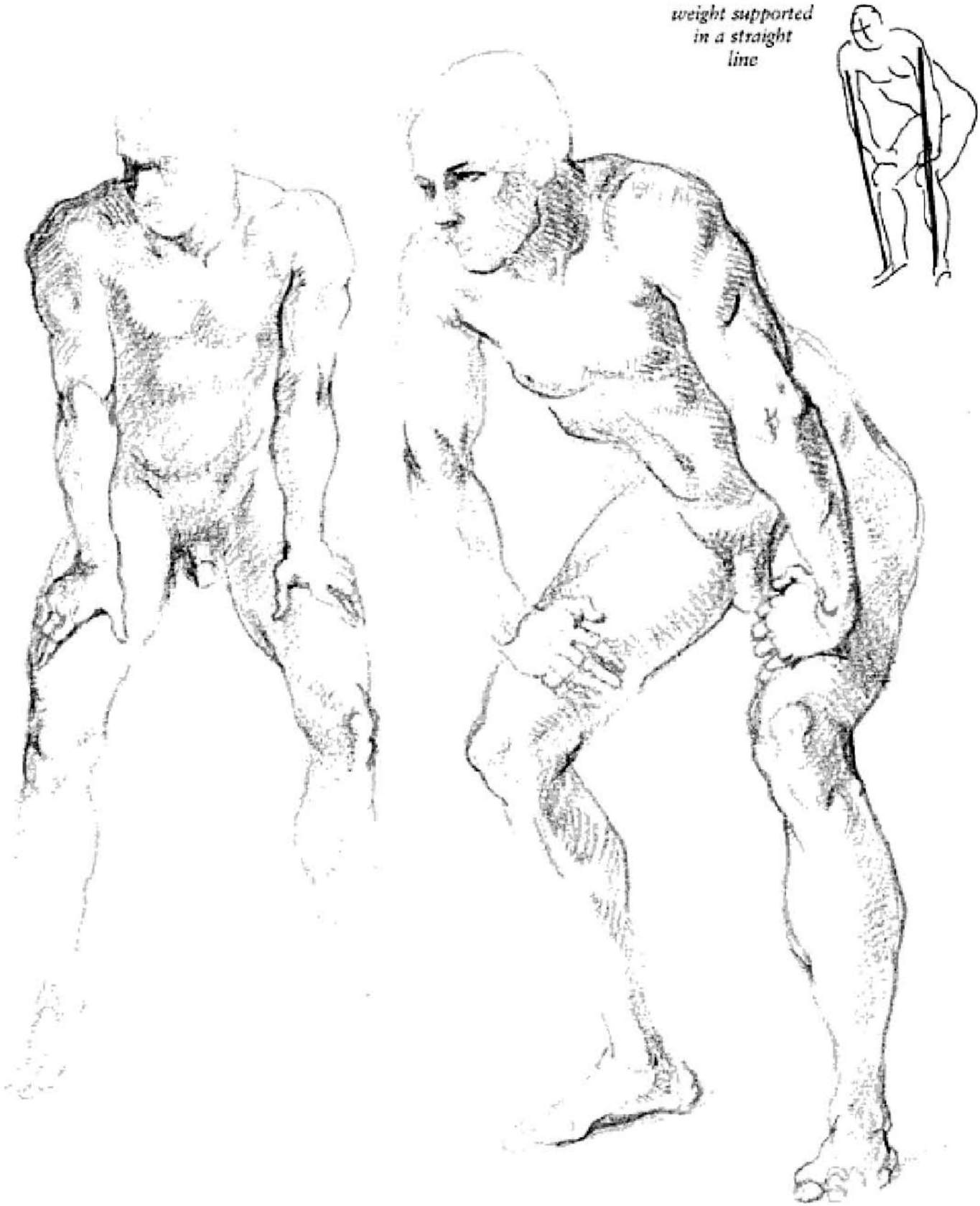
Except for a few flat-footed positions, the crouching figure gives the feeling of expectant action or of action just completed. The weight distribution is temporary. Foreshortened arms and legs become a drawing challenge.



The dark lines around the knee bring it forward. From the arm, cast shadows fall on the forward leg and help push the arm forward. The round kneecap and the triangular form of the bone beneath it are well defined.



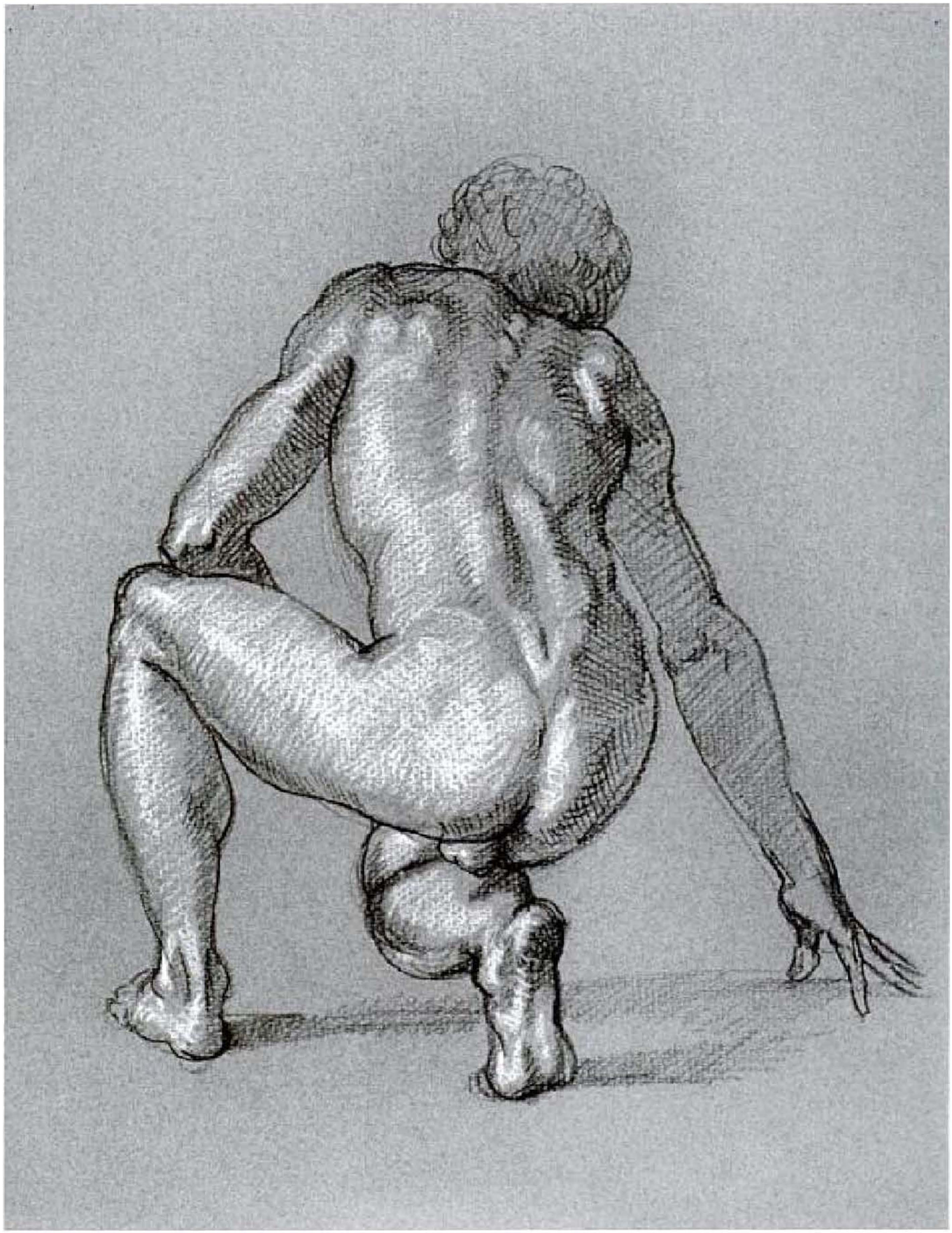
The forms of the upper left arm and breast push against each other, as do the forms of the upper and lower parts of the right leg, changing the normal contours. The dark outline and cast shadow bring the left hand forward.



These figures are posed in similar positions except that the hands point in on one and to the outside on the other. The torso weight is carried in a straight line from the lower leg through the length of the arm to the shoulder (see diagram). The locked arm flexes the triceps.



The inside of the foot shows the arch from the ball of the big toe to the heel. A large vein runs down the upper arm between the biceps and triceps and breaks up into smaller tributaries on the inside of the forearm.



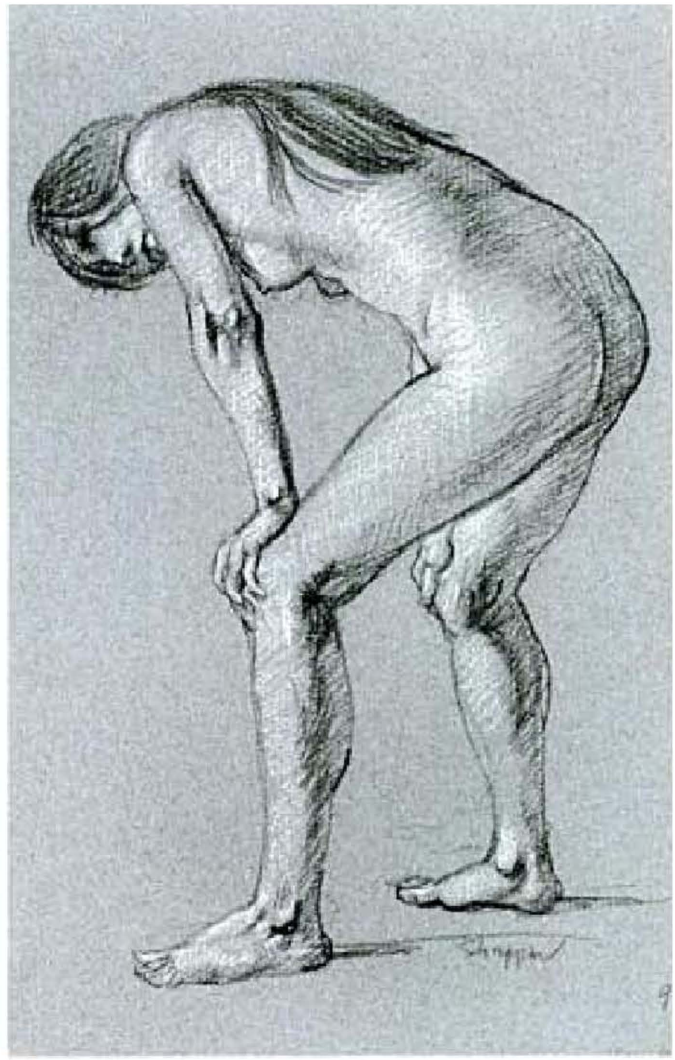
The backbone twists and the shoulders slant with it. The different shapes of the bent and straight elbow can be seen. The flat V shape of the bottom of the spine is evident between the buttock muscles.



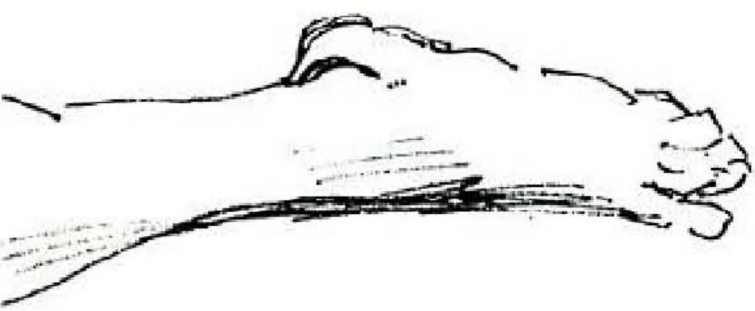
The shoulder blades are pushed together by the position of the arms.

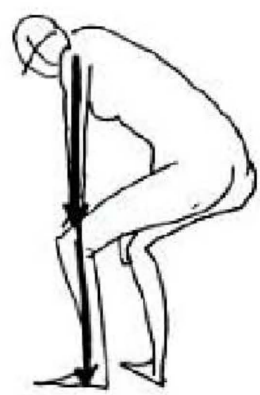


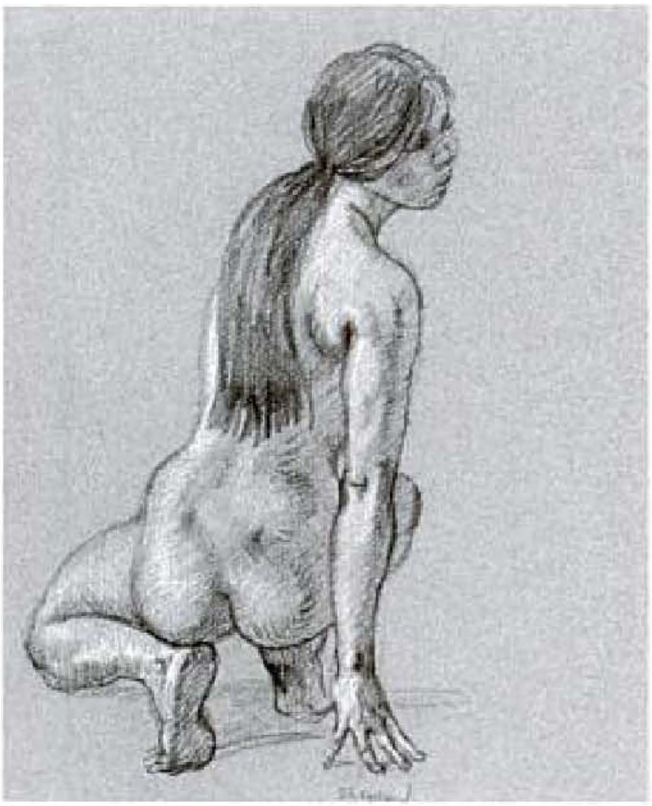
The calf muscles attach into the back of the upper leg above the knee. The model is balanced on both bent legs.



The weight of the torso is held by a continuous line that starts from the shoulders and descends through the arms and into the lower part of the leg (see diagram below). The inside anklebone is closer to the front of the foot than the outside anklebone.



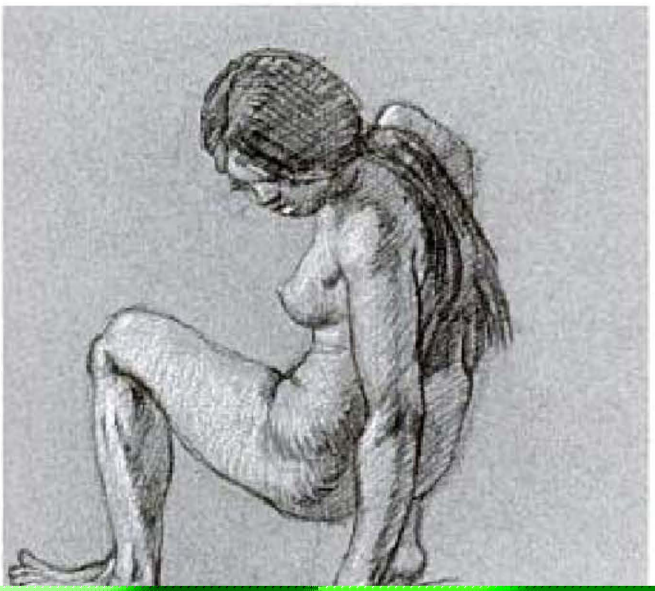


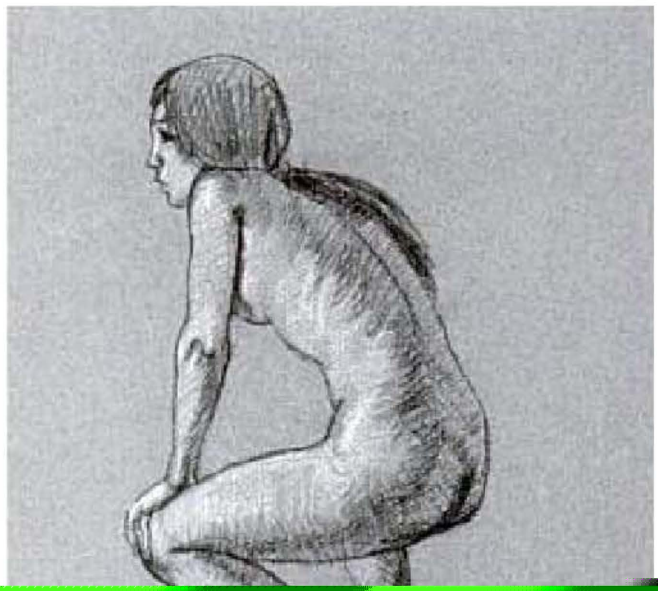


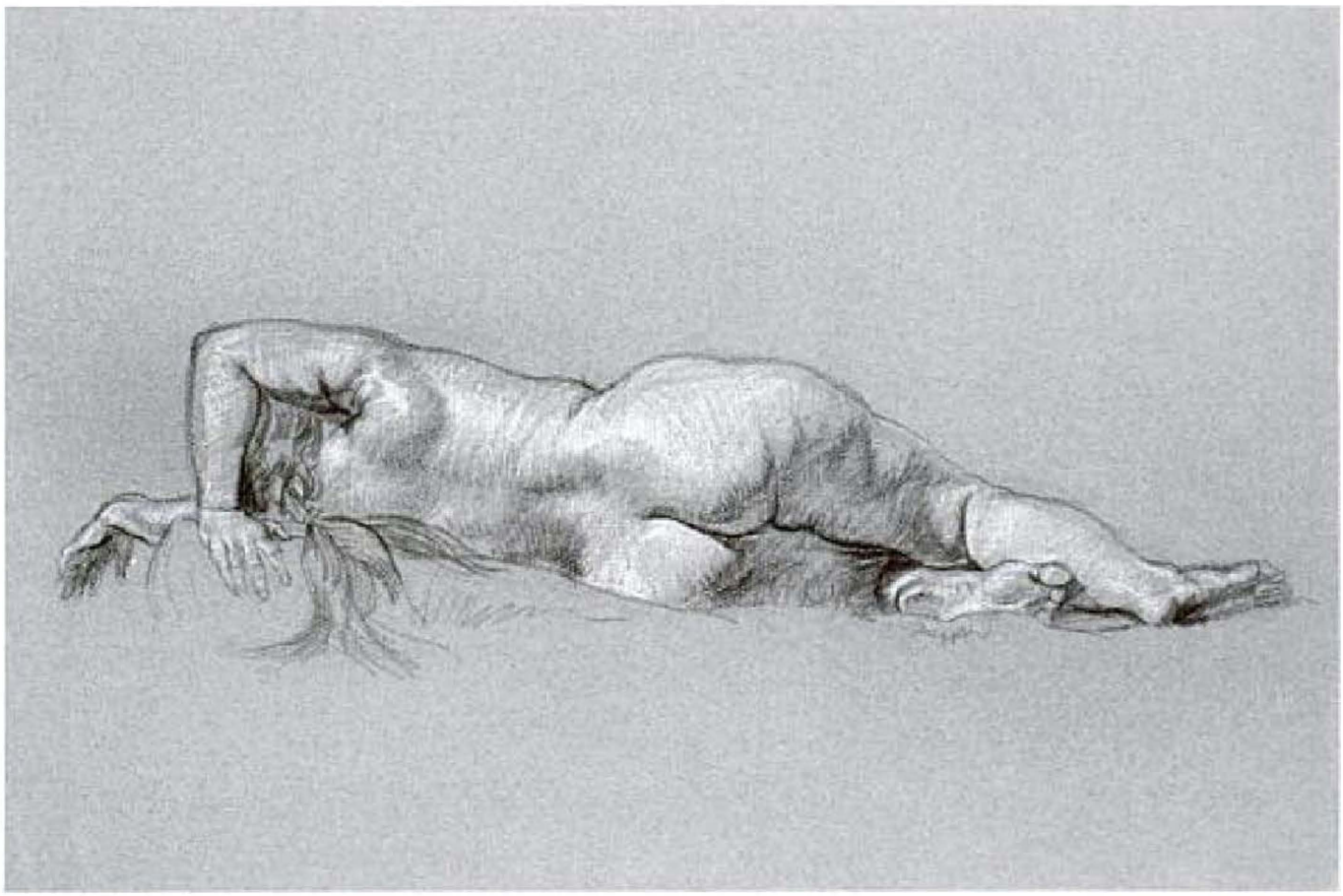
The triangular flat shape at the end of the backbone is evident. The outside of the foot is flat and the inside is arched.



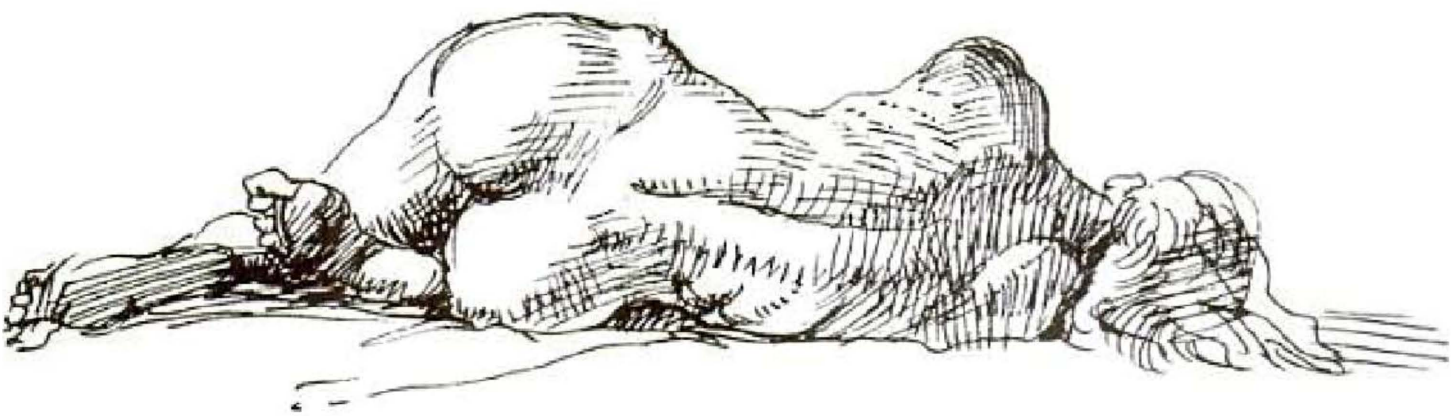
Weight is held by the toes, and one hand is used for balance. The shoulders' rib cage and the shoulder blades turn together.



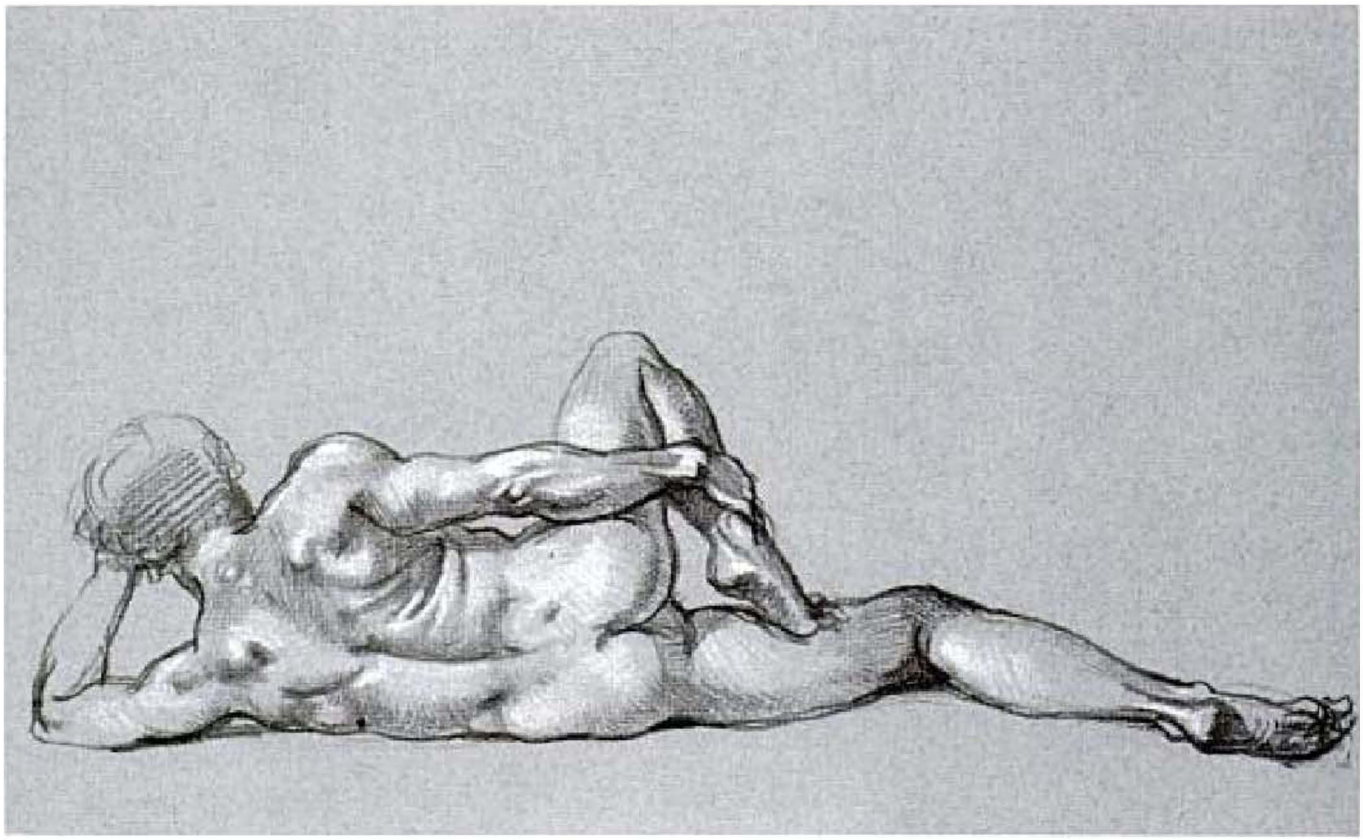




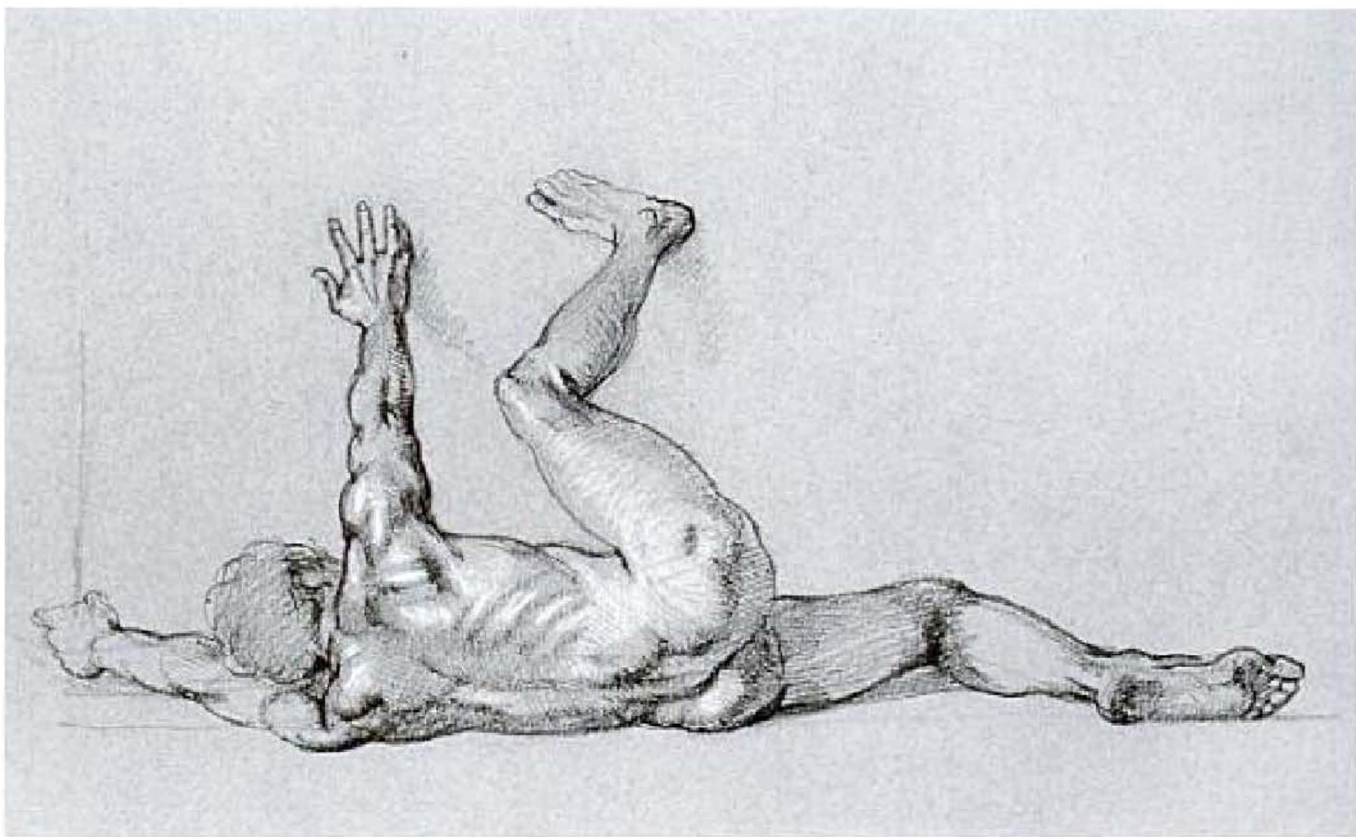
The basic female form stays the same even when the model is heavy. Dimples appear on the backs of the thighs from fat. The middle finger is always the longest finger.



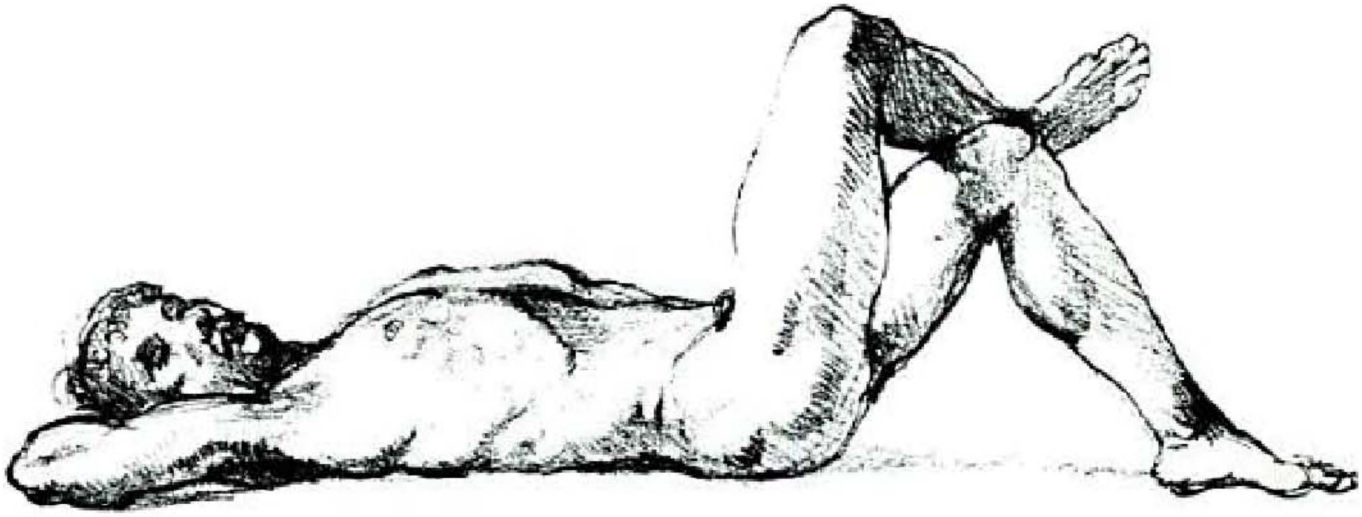
The pelvis is pushed up. Only the sole of the right foot is seen, but it suggests the complete position of the hidden leg.



Creases are formed on the torso when the leg is raised and the arm is pulled back. The hips and shoulders are at opposite angles.

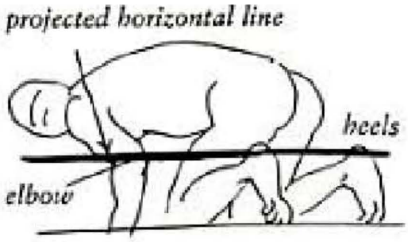


This technique—charcoal drawing reworked with ink—was used by many Old Masters, and really helps explain each form.

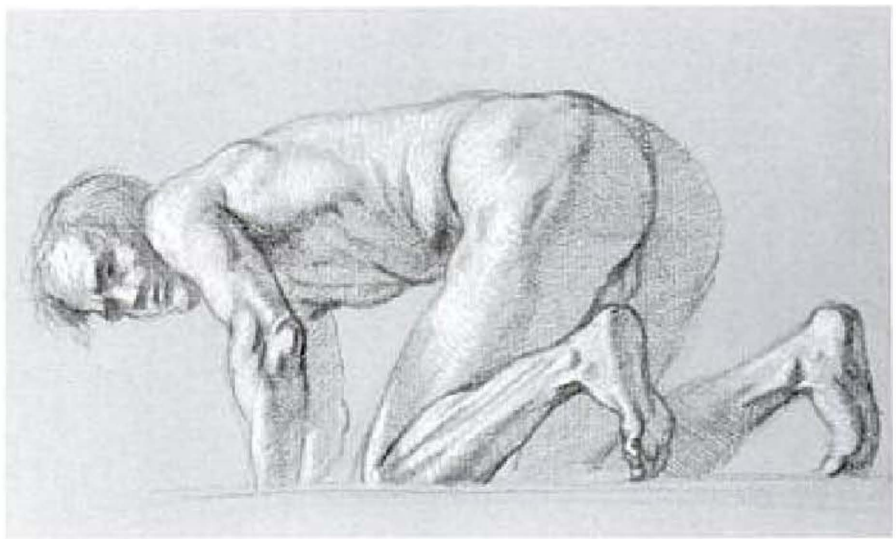


Both sides of the rib cage seem to project upward, making the cavity deep. The stomach flattens out.





Any kind of head measurement is impossible in the foreshortened figure. Finding forms that intersect horizontal or vertical lines can help. For instance, the elbow and both heels are on the same line.





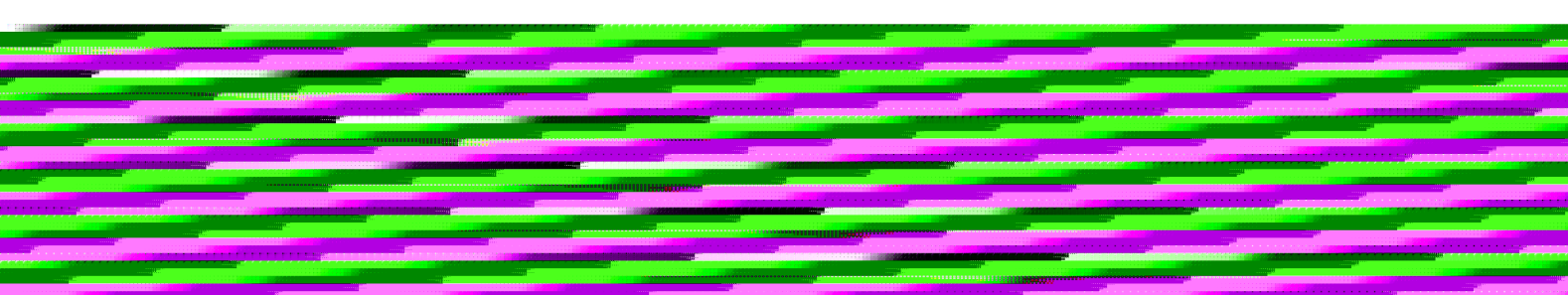
This is a wash drawing done with a brush. The figure was first drawn in with light tones. The dark accents were added after the initial wash was dry.

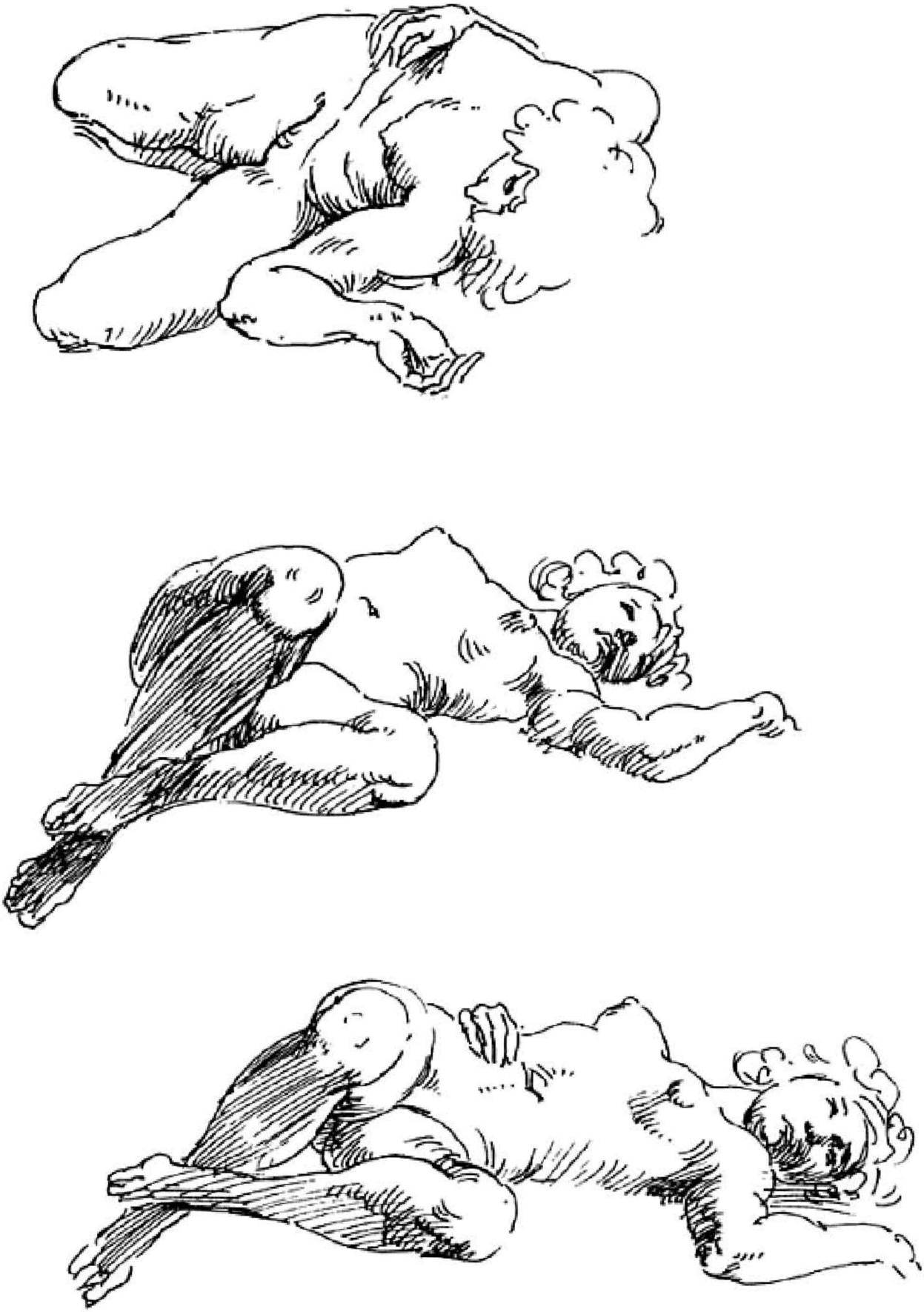


The cavity of the rib cage is defined by a dark shadow. The rib attachments on the chest are evident, and the collarbones angle back. On the right knee, the outline of the top inside bone is round and high; the outside bone of the left knee is sharper. The kneecap sits between these two bones.

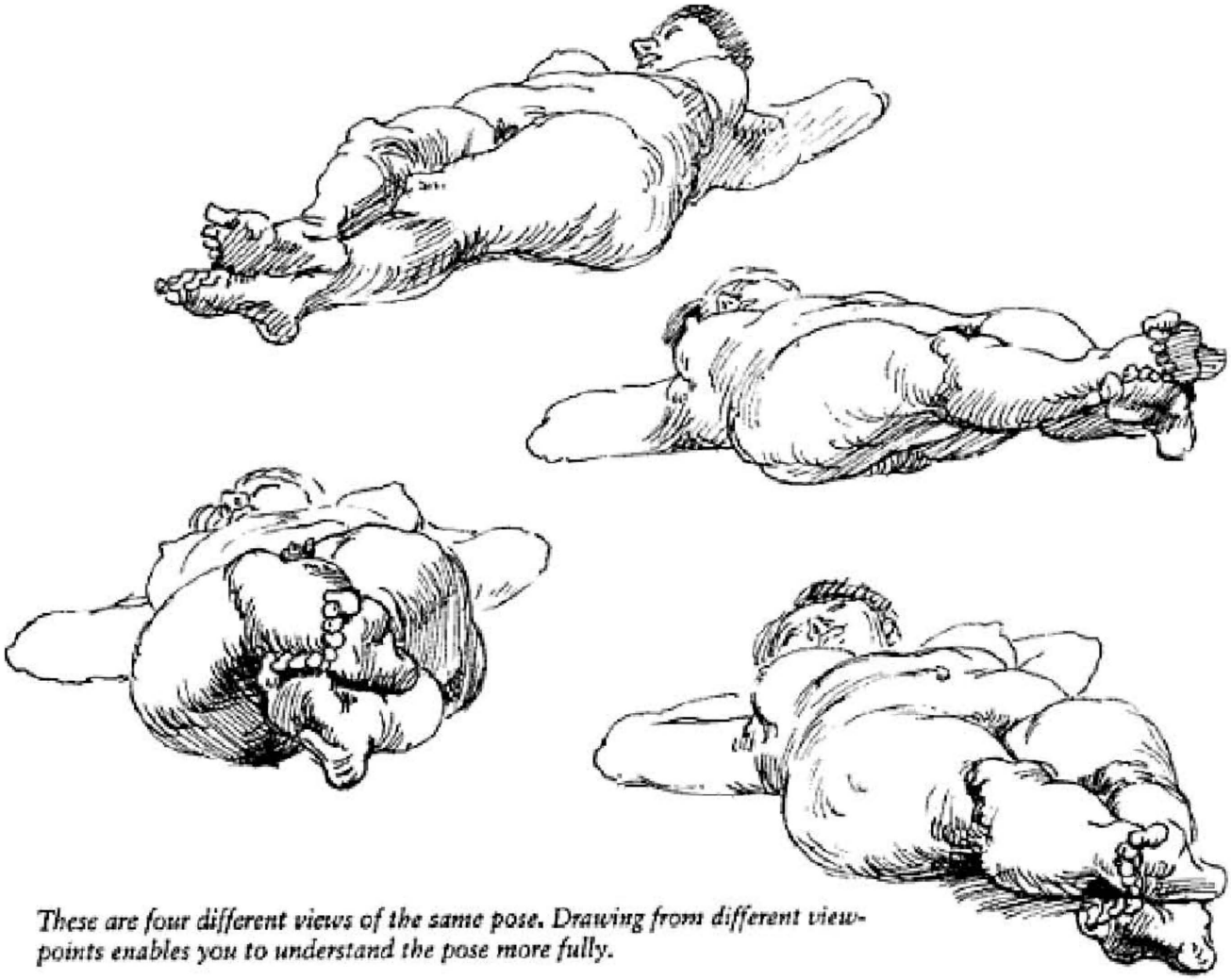


First draw the hands and knee together as one unit. Then draw the angle of the shoulders and the angle of the line projected between the two knees.





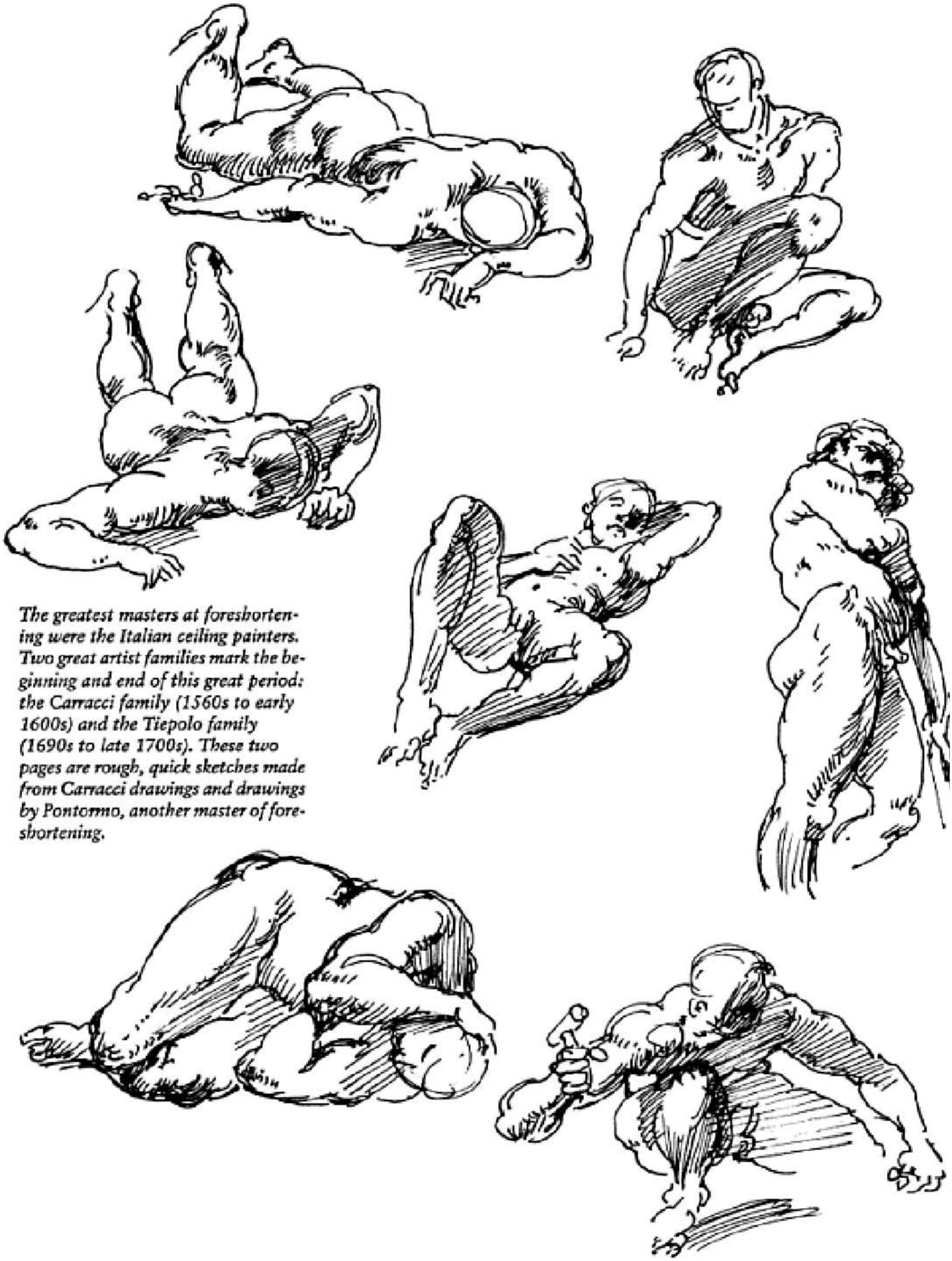
The same pose in three different views. These three drawings were made during one twenty-minute pose. The direction of the shadow lines helps explain the form.



These are four different views of the same pose. Drawing from different viewpoints enables you to understand the pose more fully.

A top view of the rib cage reveals its shape in the foreshortened torso. The chest muscles attach into the arms.





The greatest masters at foreshortening were the Italian ceiling painters. Two great artist families mark the beginning and end of this great period: the Carracci family (1560s to early 1600s) and the Tiepolo family (1690s to late 1700s). These two pages are rough, quick sketches made from Carracci drawings and drawings by Pontormo, another master of foreshortening.

THE FIGURE IN ACTION X

To make a figure appear to move, it must be drawn freely and not be over-rendered. There are three points of action that are the most expressive: the preparation for the movement, the actual movement and the follow-through. Michelangelo was a master of the first and third points. Rubens was the great master of the actual movement.

The essential thing to get down is the key line of the gesture. It is important to keep the figure off balance to make the action believable.

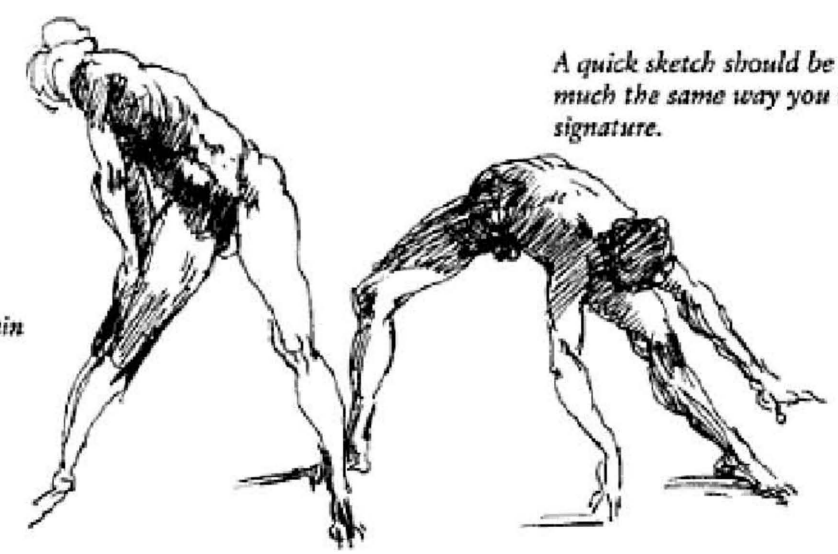


The extremely sketchy left arm still indicates the bulk of each muscle.



Here, the model is putting on a sock. His right leg is a good example of contour lines overlapped to show foreshortening.

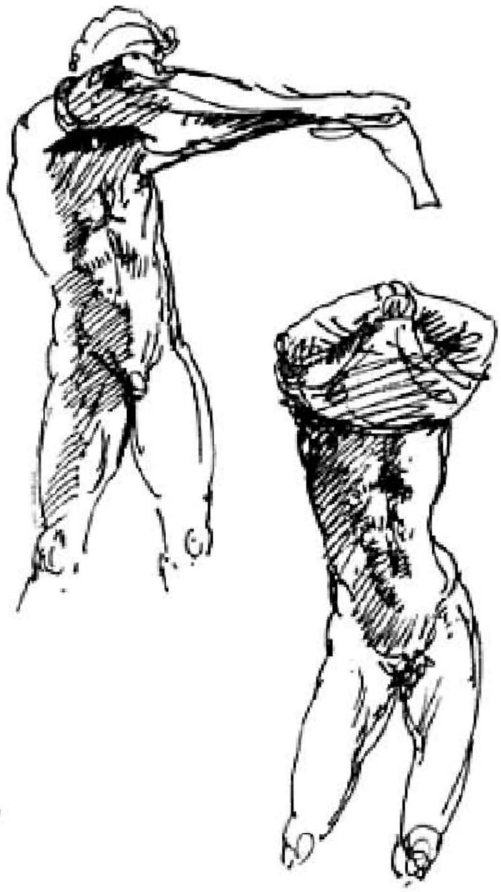
A quick sketch should be done in much the same way you write your signature.



The direction of the ribs helps explain the twisted torso.



The foreshortened legs are defined by overlapping lines.



Here are two different stages of a model putting on his sweater. Attention is given to the area between the light and shadow where the inside forms are explained.



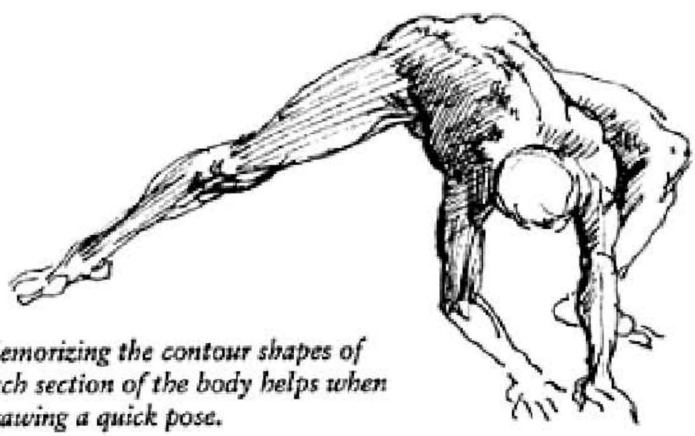
This two-minute sketch was made as the model put on pants. Action was stopped and held at the position that seemed likely to result in the most interesting drawing.



The cast shadow on the chest suggests foreshortening.



The rib cage and pelvis are evident here. The darker areas come forward; the light areas recede.



Memorizing the contour shapes of each section of the body helps when drawing a quick pose.



The light source is explained by the large shadow area.



The pen should be used in the same way that you sign your name.

The part of the hair indicates the head position.



The dark outline brings the right leg forward.





In this five-minute sketch most of the shadow area has been indicated.



CONCLUSION

I hope this book will offer an insight into the procedures of drawing from life – how to look at the model, what to stress to make a compelling drawing, how to compose the figure. It is only through drawing from life, ideally backed up by studying anatomy and copying Old Masters, that a student will gain the solid foundation needed to render the figure with authority.



INDEX

A

Abdomen in reclining figure, 96. (*See also under* Stomach.)
Angle, 103
  in figure in action, 125
  in foreshortened figure, 99, 103
  as midpoint of body, 22, 23
  of ribs, 37, 40
  of shoulder blades and arms, 37
Ankle:
  in crouching figure, 81, 84
  and forms of the figure, 22, 23
  in seated figure, 49
  in standing figure, 28, 29, 34
Arm(s):
  as balance in kneeling figure, 61, 64
  in crouching figure, 74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 82, 84, 86
  in figure in action, 116, 121, 129, 130
  in foreshortened figure, 105
  and forms of the figure, 24, 25
  in kneeling figure, 69, 70
  in reclining figure, 91, 95
  in seated figure, 44, 45, 55
  in standing figure, 30, 37, 42
Attitude. (*See also* Contrapposto.)
  in figure in action, 126, 127, 131

B

Back:
  in crouching figure, 82
  in foreshortened figure, 107, 110
  in kneeling figure, 70
  in reclining figure, 90, 91, 96
  in seated figure, 58
Belly, in seated figure, 45, 59
Biceps, in crouching figure, 86
Biceps femoris, in crouching figure, 87
Bones:
  in female vs. male, 45
  as landmarks, 3
  and proportion, 3
Breasts:
  in foreshortened figure, 104, 106
  and forms of the figure, 18
  in kneeling figure, 73
Buttocks:
  butterfly shape in, 17, 55, 56, 67
  in foreshortened figure, 108
  and forms of the figure, 17, 20
  in reclining figure, 93, 96

C

Calf muscle in foreshortened figure, 112
Carracci family, 115
Cast shadow(s), 12, 14, 15, 61, 74, 75, 88, 98, 117, 125, 129
Center of body, division of, 71
Chest:
  and forms of the figure, 19, 21
  in standing figure, 35
Chest muscles in foreshortened figure, 113
Coccyx, 51
Collarbones:
  in foreshortened figure, 102
  and forms of the figure, 19
  in kneeling figure, 63
  in seated figure, 45, 47
  in standing figure, 29, 35
Contour shapes, 117
Contrapposto, 28, 31
Coracobrachialis, in kneeling figure, 62
Crouching figure, 74-87
  charcoal drawing of, 83
  wash drawing of, 83

D

Dark accents, 49, 70, 88, 102, 131

E

Elbow(s):
  in crouching figure, 78
  in foreshortened figure, 98
  and forms of the figure, 24, 25
  in kneeling figure, 60, 62, 67, 70
  in seated figure, 53
  in standing figure, 30, 38
External oblique muscle(s), 32, 60

F

Face:
  in figure in action, 127, 130
  in foreshortened figure, 107
  proportion of, 11
Fibula, 87
Figure in action, 116-31
  drawing of, from memory, 123
  masters of, 116
  N shape in, 127
  preliminary sketch of, 122
  schematic shapes in, 128, 131
  sketched as when writing signature, 116, 118
  three points of action in, 116
Foreshortened figure, 98-115. (*See also* Foreshortening.)
  alignment in, 98, 100
  background in, 104
  direction of shadow lines in, 111
  impossibility of measurement in, 98, 102
  intersecting and overlapping lines in, 98, 102
  masters of, 115
  overlapping forms in, 108, 112
  wash drawing of, 102
Foreshortening, 49. (*See also* Foreshortened figure.)
  in crouching figure, 74
  in figure in action, 116, 117, 127
  in kneeling figure, 60, 70
  overlapping lines in, 33, 46, 70, 116, 117, 127
  in reclining figure, 88
  in seated figure, 46, 49
  in standing figure, 28, 33
Foot:
  in crouching figure, 77, 82
  in foreshortened figure, 98, 100, 108
  in kneeling figure, 64
  in seated figure, 49
  in standing figure, 43
Form(s), 94, 107, 109, 111
  in crouching figure, 75
  in figure in action, 129, 130
  in foreshortened figure, 98, 109, 107, 111
Forms of the figure, 16-27. (*See also* Midpoint of body.)
  male's vs. female's, 16, 27

G

Gluteus maximus, 67
Gluteus muscle(s), 72, 79

H

Hand(s):
  in crouching figure, 76
  in foreshortened figure, 103, 105, 107
  and forms of the figure, 26, 27
  in kneeling figure, 73
  in seated figure, 58

Head:
in figure in action, 118, 127
in foreshortened figure, 100, 102, 107
proportion of, 11
Highlight, 12, 14, 50, 93
Hipbone, 71
Hips:
in reclining figure, 94
in seated figure, 46, 52, 55, 56

I

Iliotibial band:
in crouching figure, 87
in kneeling figure, 72

K

Keyline in figure in action, 119, 121, 122
Knee(s):
in crouching figure, 74, 84
in figure in action, 123
in foreshortened figure, 98, 102, 103, 106, 107
and forms of the figure, 22, 23
in kneeling figure, 61, 63
in reclining figure, 96
in seated figure, 44
Kneecap and ligament, lollipop shape of, 63
Kneeling figure, 60-73
measurement of, 60, 71

L

Latissimus dorsi muscle:
in crouching figure, 79
in kneeling figure, 72
Leg(s):
in crouching figure, 75, 81, 82, 86, 87
in figure in action, 118, 121, 123, 125, 131
in foreshortened figure, 100, 105, 107, 112
and forms of the figure, 22, 23
in kneeling figure, 63, 70, 71, 72
in reclining figure, 88, 89, 91, 92, 93, 96
in seated figure, 45, 46, 49, 55, 59
in standing figure, 28-29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 39, 42, 43
upside-down V shape in muscles of, 23, 33
Light, using single source of, 1, 12, 13
Light and shade, 12-15, 50, 55, 57, 64, 65
Light and shadow, 57, 65, 83, 89, 107, 117, 118, 124, 131

M

Mannerist artists, 3
Michelangelo, 116
Middle tone, 12, 13, 14, 50
Midpoint of body, 22, 23

N

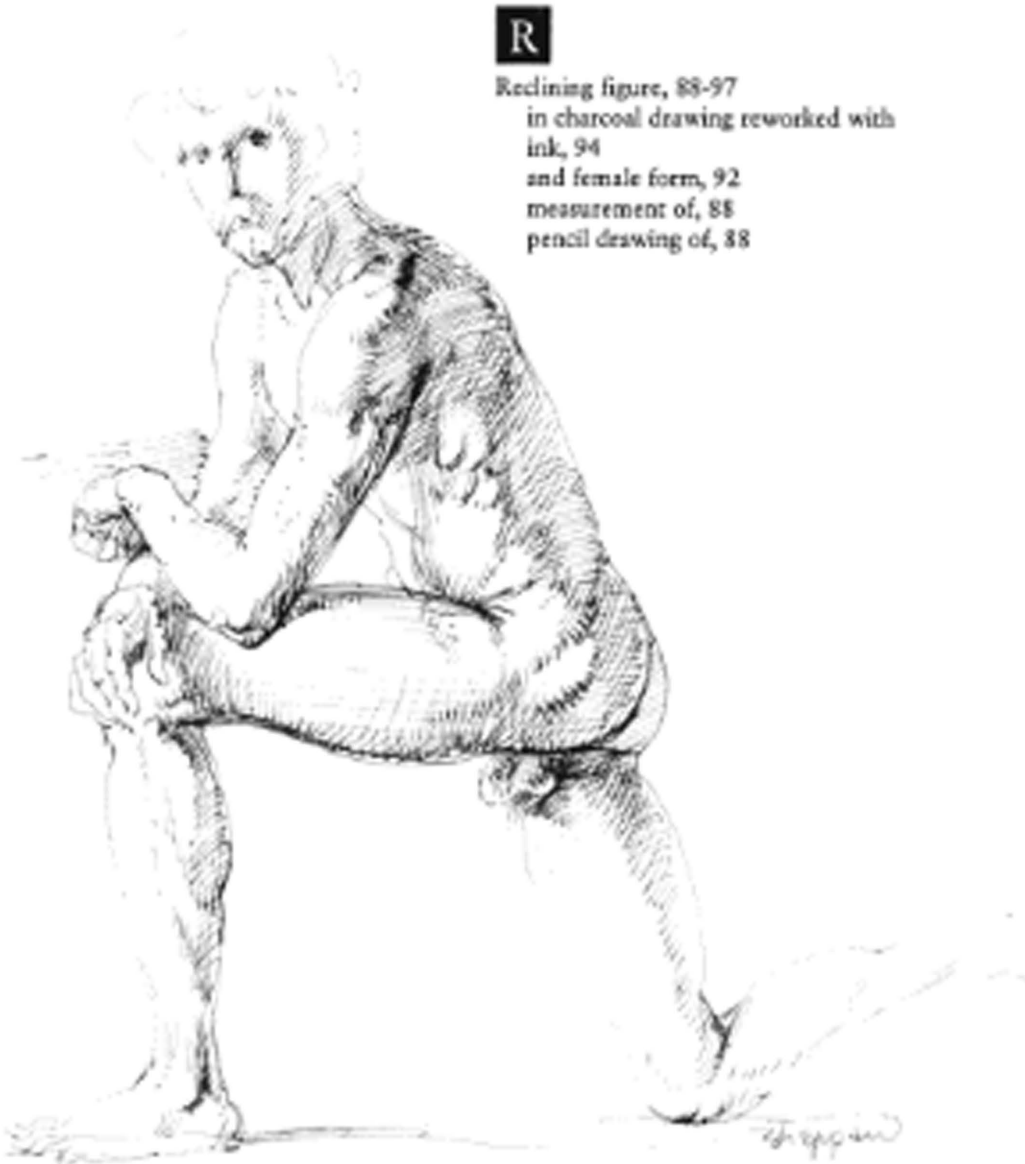
Neck, 62

P

Pectoralis, 62, 63
Pelvis:
in crouching figure, 84
in figure in action, 117, 123
and forms of the figure, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23
in kneeling figure, 67, 68, 73
in reclining figure, 90
in seated figure, 51, 52, 56
in standing figure, 32, 34, 38, 39
Pontormo, 115
Proportion(s), 3-11
head as unit of measure in, 3
in reclining figure, 88

R

Reclining figure, 88-97
in charcoal drawing reworked with ink, 94
and female form, 92
measurement of, 88
pencil drawing of, 88



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Reflected light, 12, 14
Rhomboid muscle, 90
Ribs:
in crouching figure, 82
in figure in action, 116, 117
in foreshortened figure, 102, 106, 107, 110, 113
and forms of the figure, 17, 19, 21
in kneeling figure, 72, 73
in reclining figure, 90, 93, 95
in seated figure, 52, 54, 56
in standing figure, 29, 33, 34, 36, 37, 40
Rubens, 116

S

S curve:
in figure in action, 126, 128, 130
of spine and leg, 41
in standing figure, 30, 41
S shape of shin, 22
Sacrospinalis, 67
Scapulas, 63
Seated figure, 44-59
female's vs. male's, 45
measurement of, 44, 47
in shadow washes, 57
in watercolor wash and chalk, 46
Serratus muscles:
in kneeling figure, 60, 72
in standing figure, 33
Shade. (*See* Light and shade.)
Shadow, 12, 13, 14, 55, 57, 64, 83, 88, 89, 102, 107, 123, 126
in figure in action, 119, 120, 121, 123, 125, 126, 131
Shadow accent, 12, 13, 65
Shinbone in foreshortened figure, 112
Shoulder bones and forms of the figure, 17, 20
Shoulder(s):
in crouching figure, 78, 80, 82, 85
in figure in action, 129
in foreshortened figure, 108
in kneeling figure, 68, 69
in reclining figure, 90, 94
in seated figure, 44, 47, 54, 55, 56
in standing figure, 28, 29, 31, 32, 36, 37
"Snuff box" of male hand, 27
Spine. (*See also* Triangular shape at base of spine; V shape of bottom of spine; Vertebrae in standing figure.)
in crouching figure, 78
in figure in action, 126
in reclining figure, 90, 93, 96
in seated figure, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56
Standing figure, 28-43
and ways to stand, 28
women's vs. men's, 29
Sternomastoid, 62
Stomach. (*See also under* Abdomen.)
in foreshortened figure, 104, 107
in reclining figure, 95

T

Tiepolo family, 115
Toe(s):
in figure in action, 130
in reclining figure, 89, 96
Torso:
in figure in action, 116
in reclining figure, 94, 96
Trapezius muscle:
in kneeling figure, 68
in reclining figure, 90
in standing figure, 37
Triangular shape at base of spine, 17, 52, 56, 82
Triceps, 67

V

V shape of bottom of spine, 78
Vastus lateralis, 87
Vertebrae in standing figure, 36, 38
Viewpoint:
in figure in action, 124
in foreshortened figure, 100, 113
Violin shape on torso, 19, 34

W

Waist of women vs. of men, 29
Weight distribution
in crouching figure, 74, 76, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85
in figure in action, 119, 121, 122, 123, 126, 130
in foreshortened figure, 110
in kneeling figure, 60, 61, 65
in seated figure, 44, 48
in standing figure, 28, 31, 32, 40, 42, 43
Wrist:
in reclining figure, 89
in seated figure, 58
in standing figure, 37, 42

About the Author

Joseph Sheppard attended the Maryland Institute of Art, where he studied with Jacques Maroger, the former technical director of the Louvre and reformulater of the painting medium used by the Old Masters. He has received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Traveling Fellowship. His work is in many prestigious collections throughout the United States and he has received several major commissions for murals in Baltimore and Chicago. He is the author of six art instruction books and until 1976, he taught drawing, painting, and anatomy at the Maryland Institute of Art. He is a member of the Allied Artist's of America, the Knickerbocker Artists, New York; and the National Sculpture Society. Mr. Sheppard resides in Pietrasanta, Italy, where he maintains a studio.

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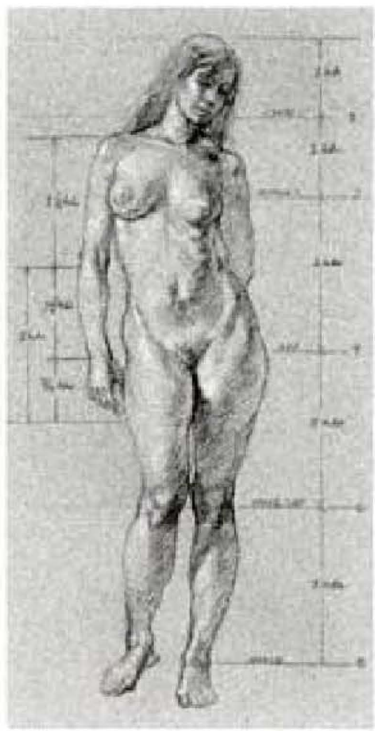
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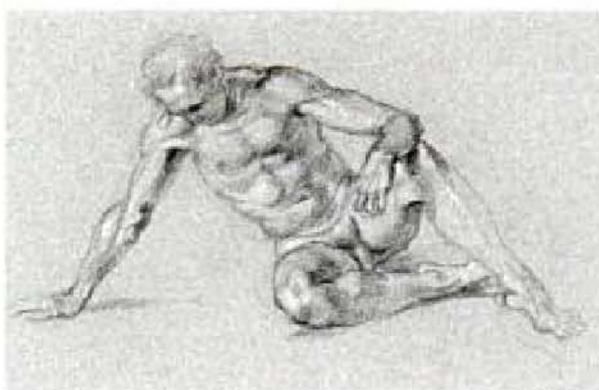




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